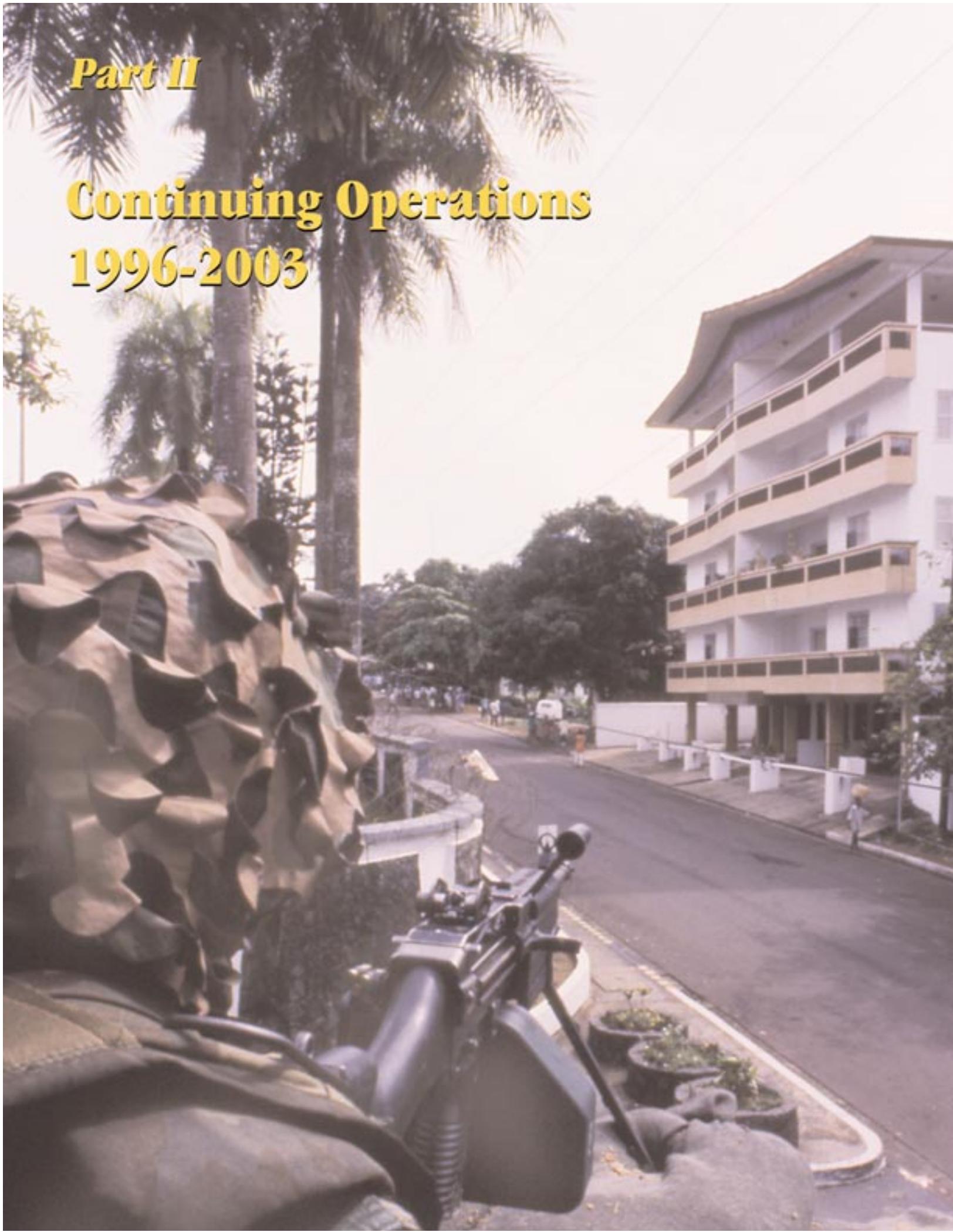


Part II

**Continuing Operations
1996-2003**



Chapter 5

22d MEU in Operation Assured Response

Civil War Continues

A tenuous ceasefire remained in effect in Liberia from the time Marines departed in February 1991 until October 1992, but frequent ceasefire violations occurred after the Lome truce. Because of the failure to get all sides involved, peace remained elusive. Fighting quickly spread eastward into neighboring Sierra Leone in March 1991. Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) fighters worked with the fledgling Revolutionary United Front against the government of Sierra Leone and captured several lucrative diamond-mining areas. Within a year, the West African peacekeeping force and the Sierra Leone army had prodded the rebels out of most of the occupied cities and villages and into the Sierra Leone countryside. A new Liberian militia group, the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), attacked NPFL forces from Sierra Leone and moved into western Liberia. Many former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers joined ULIMO.

In October 1991, a series of negotiations attended by all factions at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, produced an agreement requiring all factions to confine their fighters to camps, disarm under the peacekeepers' supervision, and agree to support elections.²²³ In accordance with the agreement, the NPFL allowed peacekeepers to deploy into the countryside. The NPFL also recognized the authority of the peacekeepers, a primarily English speaking African force, and its parent organization, the Economic Community of West African States. The peacekeepers added 1,200 Senegalese soldiers to balance the force with substantial French speaking African troops.²²⁴

But Taylor's NPFL and other factions did not disarm. Taylor increased his power by creating a

shadow state, issuing money and selling timber, gold, and diamonds in NPFL controlled areas.²²⁵ By 1992, NPFL fighters killed a few Senegalese troops and temporarily took more than 400 peacekeepers hostage. Clashes continued and the peacekeepers withdrew to the greater Monrovia area. On 15 October, major hostilities resumed as the NPFL launched an offensive to take the capital. Heavy fighting took place when the fighters entered the suburbs of the city, which resulted in the displacement of an estimated 200,000 Liberians.²²⁶ On 20 October, the U.S. Embassy conducted an ordered departure of American citizens. In four days, charter and military aircraft evacuated 170 Americans.²²⁷ Twenty embassy personnel stayed behind, including the Marine security guard detachment.*

Deployed in the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility, the 26th MEU (Special Operations Capable) closely tracked the developments in Liberia. Alerted for possible evacuation contingencies during the fighting in October 1992, the Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), composed of the 26th MEU (SOC) and Amphibious Squadron (Phibron) 8, at the time supported both Operation Provide Comfort and scheduled Sixth Fleet exercises. No attempt was made to assist in contingency operations in Liberia while the Mediterranean ARG conducted split operations.²²⁸ Fortunately, Taylor's troops never entered the city. The West African peacekeepers blunted Taylor's offensive on the outskirts of the city using tanks, artillery, naval gun-

* Initially, the regional security officer directed part of the Marine security guard to evacuate due to a mandated number of personnel that were to remain behind. But those numbers conflicted with the embassy's existing emergency action plan, which mandated the number of personnel to be evacuated.



Photo courtesy of the authors

Armed National Patriotic Liberation Front fighters skirt the southern edge of the American Embassy compound in search of United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy militia members. Escalating conflict between the two groups again forced many American citizens into the embassy.

fire, and air support. Eventually, the peacekeepers regained control of greater Monrovia.

As the bloodletting continued into 1993, ULIMO stepped up its attacks on the NPFL, but the peacekeepers eventually disarmed them. A massacre of 600 civilians on 6 June by the AFL occurred in the West African-controlled city of Harbel.²²⁹ The incident seriously weakened confidence in the peacekeepers as protectors, as they appeared to favor certain factions. In another round of negotiations by the Economic Community of West African States at Cotonou, Benin, the factions again agreed to a ceasefire and a timetable for disarmament and elections. Signatures from representatives of the Organization of African Unity and United Nations added support to the accords in July. As a result, the United Nations established a 368-man observer force, called the United Nations Observer Mission Liberia.²³⁰ The accord replaced the inter-

im government of Amos Sawyer with a Liberian national transitional government. After considerable delay, the transitional government took control in March 1994, but the plans for elections in September collapsed. During September, former AFL elements staged an unsuccessful coup.

Significant disarmament and demobilization of the factions did not take place due to differences over political and economic power. While negotiations continued, the fragile peace quickly disintegrated as outbreaks of fighting occurred in the countryside. In 1994, the ULIMO group split into two ethnic factions, the ULIMO-K (predominately Mandingo and Muslim) under Alhiji Kromah and ULIMO-J (predominately Krahn) led by Roosevelt Johnson. Another Krahn faction, the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) headed by George Boley, also appeared and began fighting the NPFL. Competing factions eventually mushroomed into seven separate militia groups.

Areas outside the Monrovia-Buchanan-Gbarnga peacekeeping zone remained inaccessible due to deteriorating security. Fighting between the factions resumed with Taylor losing, then regaining his headquarters at Gbarnga. The lack of security in the countryside forced the U.N. military observers to reduce the size of this mission and its activities. The continuing flow of arms and the unwillingness to uphold a ceasefire fueled more violence.

At Abuja, Nigeria, negotiations ended with the factions signing the 13th peace accord in August 1995. The plan formed a new Liberian transitional national government composed at first of a five-person, then later a six-person, Counsel of State. Sworn in on 1 September, faction leaders Charles Taylor (NPFL), Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K), and George Boley (LPC) received cabinet posts together with three civilians.

By December, the ceasefire again broke down and fighting occurred between ULIMO-J and West African peacekeepers at Tubmanburg, which began initially over control of diamond mines. With all the factional leaders living in Monrovia, clashes between other cabinet ministers' factions took place and only token disarmament occurred. Council calls for the arrest of Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J) on 12 March 1996 sparked a brief outburst of violence in the city. At the beginning of April, another attempt to arrest Johnson spurred an outbreak of widespread fighting in Monrovia.

Introduction of American Forces

The NPFL, ULIMO-J, and other Krahn smuggled arms and fighters into the city, creating a potential powder keg. In early April, the situation came to a head when Council member Taylor (NPFL) issued a 72-hour ultimatum to Johnson (ULIMO-J) to turn himself in. Similar to the March incident, a combined NPFL and ULIMO-K force went to arrest Johnson. The ensuing fighting started at approximately 0300 on 6 April and created chaos inside the city, which previously had been a safe haven from the conflict in the countryside.²³¹ By mid-morning, Americans fleeing from the violence began arriving at the embassy. The fighters who had infiltrated the city drew on hidden caches of arms and ammunition and the violence quickly escalated. The Emergency Action Committee met that evening at the U.S. Embassy with Sergeant Luiz E. Sanchez, the acting Marine security guard detachment commander, in atten-

dance.* The staff expressed concern for the safety and accountability of Americans and the meeting ended with a request for security assistance and for permission to draw down the staff.

On directions from the embassy's regional security officer, Sergeant Sanchez put an additional Marine security guard at Post One, doubling the number of guards at that post. Inundated with calls on seven different radio nets, Post One Marines remained extremely busy controlling access, monitoring nets, talking on radios, and passing messages. The Marines frequently heard sounds of gunfire or rocket-propelled grenades exploding in the city. One mortar round exploded in the U.N. observer compound just across the street from the embassy. Sergeant Sanchez frequently observed fighters moving within the view of the embassy's closed-circuit television camera security system. The fighters brandished weapons as they drove by the embassy in stolen vehicles. Refugees, looters, and groups of drunk or marijuana-high fighters roamed the streets. The Marines also received reports of fighting at the airport, Barclay Training Center, and in the Mamba Point area. The violence increased as additional NPFL and ULIMO-K troops poured in from the countryside.²³²

The escalation forced humanitarian aid organizations to depart as combatants pillaged aid organizations' buildings and warehouses. By Easter Sunday, 7 April, more than 400 people waited in the compound for evacuation. The embassy opened the gates of Graystone compound to provide refuge for the Liberian population and 15,000 displaced Liberians quickly filled the American-controlled compound while others roamed the streets looking for safe haven.²³³

American citizens in town were taken off guard by the violence and were quickly caught in the middle of the fighting. Many telephoned the embassy for help. Marine security guards relayed calls to the regional security officer who repeatedly left the compound to intervene, accompanied at times by a faction liaison officer. To get to the embassy, Americans had to run a gauntlet of roadblocks where they were shaken down or seized. Chaos and terror reigned throughout the

* Staff Sergeant Jerry A. Blandford, the commander of the Marine security guard detachment at the time of the outbreak of fighting, was on leave in the United States. He and one replacement, after a number of flights, flew into the embassy about a week later on helicopters from Special Operations Command, Europe. (Sergeant Luiz E. Sanchez interview, 27Oct97 [Oral History Collection])

city as armed fighters robbed, looted, broke into homes, and threatened citizens. Mobs invaded the facilities of the U.N. relief agencies and stole more than 300 vehicles, pillaging warehouses and destroying property as they went. At the airport, two aircraft were hit by rocket fire and exploded into flames.

Acting similar to the warring factions, many peacekeepers abandoned their posts as the fighting spread or did nothing to intervene to stop the fighting or looting. Groups of soldiers from the West African force actually participated in the looting. Many of the Nigerian soldiers had not been paid in four months and some sold ammunition or handed over their weapons to the Krahn. Most peacekeepers hastily retreated to their bases, although some remained guarding selected facilities and businesses while allowing the looting to go on around them.²³⁴

The embassy's request for military support prompted a presidential announcement on 9 April to send in U.S. forces to assist in the evacuation of Americans and other foreigners.²³⁵ Responding to the tasking from the national command author-

ities, European Command established a joint task force headed by U.S. Army Brigadier General Michael A. Canavan, the commanding general of European Special Operations Command.²³⁶ The special operations forces received alert orders on 6 and 7 April to move to Dakar, Senegal, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, to assemble in support of evacuation operations in Liberia. The 10-day operation was the first time the command element of the European Special Operations Command formed as a joint task force.²³⁷ Named Assured Response, the operation's deployment order directed the pre-positioning of equipment and aircraft at an intermediate support base in Dakar, Senegal, and at a forward support base in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The mission of the joint task force was to conduct a noncombatant evacuation and protect the lives of American citizens and designated third- and host-country nationals in Monrovia.²³⁸

A succession of firefights took place in front of the embassy before the joint task force arrived. Johnson's ULIMO-J fighters gathered in an area near Gate One, later nicknamed "Crack Alley" by



DVIC DF-SD-01-09185

This view down United Nations Drive, which borders the full length of the American Embassy's landward wall, shows where much of the looting of other nations' embassy and consular buildings took place.



DoD (USAF) 960411-F-0954H-005

American citizens evacuated from Monrovia exit the tail of a U.S. Air Force MH-53 Pave Low helicopter in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The helicopter and its crew deployed from the 352d Special Operations Group, Mildenhall, United Kingdom.

the Marines. Near the Wellington apartments, a number of armed fighters in vehicles and on foot roamed around looking for places to loot. The fighters on the street, within view of the embassy's Mezbau Gate, repeatedly fired random shots. In a risky move aimed at dissuading the fighters from breaking in and stealing the visible U.S. government vehicles, Lance Corporal Edward A. Davis, III, dashed from cover, unarmed and under full observation of the armed fighters, and placed an American flag on a chain-link fence gate. This action helped deter the fighters, who later invaded and looted other buildings near the embassy.²³⁹

With a Special Operations Command, Europe, assessment and Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams on the way, Marine security guards and the local guard force prepared the embassy's landing zone by taking down the basketball court backboards, hoops, and poles, cutting trees, and placing light markers on the fence line. A six-person survey and assessment team landed first, followed by an 18-man SEAL team. Both elements disembarked

on 9 April from Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low helicopters in the embassy landing zone. The team established security positions in conjunction with the regional security officer and the five Marine security guards.* The two helicopters left fully loaded with evacuees who were waiting in the compound.²⁴⁰

Fighting continued outside the embassy and on 11 April, after beating two local unarmed guards, fighters with weapons entered the embassy grounds and attempted to break into the diplomatic quarters. The SEALs reacted by rounding up the fighters with no casualties and then releasing them. Additional special operations personnel soon arrived. Rounds from small arms posed a constant threat to the helicopters landing in the embassy landing zone. One rocket-propelled grenade exploded near an incoming helicopter, prompting the joint task force to switch to night helicopter landings. During the day, fire was

* Marine Security Guard Detachment, Monrovia, normally consisted of seven Marines.

heaviest in the afternoon and most U.S. personnel remained inside to avoid stray rounds regularly impacting within the compound. By 16 April, the South European Army Task Force's initial ready company, Company C, 325th Airborne Combat Team, manned defensive positions and ran security patrols in the compound.²⁴¹

Sporadic fighting continued throughout the city with heavy fighting taking place between the NPFL, ULIMO-J, and Krahs. Smoke from fires set by looters or started by shelling billowed from the city. Evacuees gave firsthand accounts of Guinean peacekeeping troops joining in the looting and selling weapons to the fighters. Although West African tanks rolled through parts of the city, the troops remained ineffective in restoring order. At the Barclay Training Center, Krahn and Johnson's ULIMO-J men defended the compound while holding peacekeepers hostage against NPFL attacks.²⁴² The Barclay Training Center repeatedly received barrages of machine gun fire and volleys of rocket-propelled grenades. In the central business district and on Bushrod Island, gangs of

armed youth roamed the area pillaging and burning businesses.

The bitter fighting resulted in special operations forces and diplomatic security personnel conducting a number of rescues to save American citizens outside the compound. After nine days, more than 2,200 noncombatants representing 73 countries, including approximately 540 Americans, had been evacuated. Most evacuees left the embassy landing zone by helicopters and flew to the forward support base at Lungi Airfield in Sierra Leone. By 18 April, Lungi had become home to the special operations forces command element, which comprised nine helicopters, two aircraft, and approximately 650 personnel. From the airfield, aircraft delivered the evacuees to a safe haven at Dakar, Senegal. Once at the Dakar airport terminal, embassy and joint task force personnel assisted in processing the evacuees to their final destinations. At the height of the deployment, the special operation forces positioned 11 aircraft and close to 600 support personnel in Dakar.²⁴³ On arrival, the Marines inherited only a



DVIC DF-SD-01-09184

Civilian evacuees waiting on board a Lockheed MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft from the 352d Special Operations Group for their next flight to Dakar, Senegal, where they would be turned over to U.S. State Department representatives for the last segment of the evacuation from Liberia.

small portion of General Canavan's special operations forces, assets, and support bases.

Marines Take the Reins

As early as 10 April, U.S. Army General George A. Joulwan, Commander in Chief, European Command, wanted to ensure the return of his special operations forces. After issuing the execute order for Assured Response, his staff followed with a modification of the plan, which called for replacing the special operations joint task force with a Marine joint task force if the situation did not stabilize quickly. The modification would provide the right force for any lengthy operation. Since the inception of Assured Response, General Joulwan recognized the utility of the Mediterranean ARG for any long-term situation.

Alerted by telephone the day before, the 22d MEU (SOC) commander, Colonel M. Wayne Forbush, received the first modification to the European Command Assured Response execute order on 11 April. The order directed the Mediterranean ARG with the embarked Landing Force Sixth Fleet to sail at best speed to Monrovia, Liberia. With no relief from Sixth Fleet's ongoing exercise requirements, Colonel Forbush understood the situation required split-MEU operations. The additional mission now assigned to 22d MEU was to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations and to provide security for the American Embassy in Liberia. Three of the ships, USS *Guam* (LPH 9), USS *Trenton* (LPD 14), and USS *Portland* (LSD 37), located in the Adriatic Sea, got underway immediately. The last ship, the USS *Tortuga* (LSD 46), was undergoing repairs at the port of Haifa, Israel. The majority of the MEU staff also was in Israel planning for exercise Noble Shirley. MEU elements on the *Tortuga*, the artillery, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, and the light armored reconnaissance company, Company D (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, went ashore in Israel to conduct a scheduled exercise. No cross-decking or reconfiguration was necessary other than transporting six weapons carrier high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles (humvees) to Sierra Leone from Israel.²⁴⁴

A forward liaison cell departed the *Guam* on 14 April 1996 with a mission focused on liaison and preparation for the turnover of the forces at the embassy. Lieutenant Colonel James F. Barnes, the 22d MEU executive officer, led the four-man team. Flying by C-130 to Freetown, Sierra Leone,



USS *Guam* (LPH 9) MARG 1-96 Deployment Cruise Book
In mid-April, Col Melvin W. Forbush was appointed Joint Task Force Assured Response commander when the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit assumed the evacuation and security mission from the Army.

the team went to the joint task force rear headquarters located at the airport's lounge building. Inside the building, Lieutenant Colonel Barnes recalled: "There must have been 25 colonels and 50 lieutenant colonels."²⁴⁵ Seeing the large number of officers, soldiers, and airmen present at the joint task force headquarters, Barnes realized the expeditionary unit needed to bring in additional MEU staff to coordinate operations.

At the embassy, Ambassador William B. Milam learned of the deployment of the Marines during one of his live interagency secure teleconferences after the special operations force's arrival. On 15 April, the Marines of the forward liaison cell arrived at the embassy in Monrovia and coordinated with the European Special Operations Command's forward headquarters, the U.S. Army infantry battalion commander, and the Ambassador and his staff. Ambassador Milam previously had worked with Marines and met Lieutenant Colonel Barnes during Operation Sea Angel.²⁴⁶

The forward liaison cell relayed an initial assessment to the MEU recommending the introduction of the same size force the special operations joint task force had at the embassy, as well as staff visits before the ship arrived in Liberian waters. Agreeing to the suggestion of staff liaison visits, the 22d MEU commander sent 11 members of his staff and subordinate elements to visit Lungi Airfield headquarters and the embassy in Monrovia from 17 to 19 April. By 18 April, special operations elements at Freetown and Dakar were ordered to redeploy because of the arrival of the Army's initial ready company. The special opera-

tions forces immediately began breaking down tents and packing equipment for departure.

By 18 April, the special operations joint task force had completed evacuation of all Americans in an "authorized departure status," those wanting to leave voluntarily. Only 18 official American and State Department personnel remained at the embassy.* On 19 April, emergency talks sponsored by the Economic Community of West African States brought a temporary halt to the fighting in Monrovia, but the situation remained tense.

That same day, ships carrying Marines arrived at Mamba Station located off the coast of Liberia. The 22d MEU commander, Colonel Forbush, received another modification to the European Command order, which directed the Marines to assume the European Special Operations Command evacuation and security mission. He quickly recalled his visiting staff on 19 April to help the MEU command element assume the additional responsibilities as a joint task force headquarters. Upon completion of the turnover, Colonel Forbush relieved Brigadier General Canavan and assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. The joint task force initially included: the 22d MEU; Amphibious Squadron 2 (the *Guam* ARG) led by Captain William D. Young, USN; the Air Force's 4050th Operations Squadron led by Colonel Wayne Mudge, USAF; and a detachment from the Navy's Fleet Air Mediterranean at the forward support base in Freetown, commanded by Captain Charles White, USN.

The 22d MEU staff members assumed new responsibilities as the joint task force staff and adjusted to meet the requirements of both the MEU commander and the commander in chief. With the staff already split, planning sustained operations required long hours from the staff's remaining junior officers and staff noncommissioned officers. The MEU requested and received from the II Marine Expeditionary Force minimal

* The 22d MEU called on its Marine KC-130 detachment to transport essential staff members. Detachment "A," Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252 (VMGR-252) performed the mission. The two aircraft detachments, normally on stand-by in the continental U.S., had already deployed to support the planned Noble Shirley exercise in Israel. Although the aircraft were normally under the operational control of Sixth Fleet, European Command's modification to the Assured Response execute order placed the aircraft under control of the commander of the joint task force on 24 April 1996. (Major James K. Kazin interview, 12 Sep96 [Oral History Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.]

individual staff augmentation for the joint task force.

Actions Ashore

At 0600 on 20 April, the first helicopter sorties carrying Marines arrived to replace the soldiers at the embassy in Monrovia. The well briefed platoon guides from Company F and Weapons Company BLT 2/2 came ashore first. The main body of Marines began arriving at the basketball court landing zone one hour later. Company F arrived first, quickly followed by the small 22d MEU forward command element and some MEU Service Support Group 22 (MSSG-22) personnel. Fast attack vehicles debarked carrying .50-caliber machine guns, Mk19 grenade launchers, and tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided missiles, commonly called TOW missiles. These vehicles combined with the mortars, machine guns, and sniper weapons already on station at the embassy significantly enhanced the Marines' firepower. The MEU completed the entire lift by 1015.

Company F, commanded by Captain Eric M. Mellinger, assumed security of the compound. The smooth transition left Marine squad leaders and platoon commanders with fire plans and field sketches drawn by the departing airborne troops. Starting at about 1230, soldiers from Company C, 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry, left in six sorties of three Boeing MH-47D Chinook helicopters. The last flight out of the embassy at 2015 included the outgoing commander of the European Special Operations Command's Joint Task Force Assured Response. That evening, more than 275 Marines protected the compound. Captain Mellinger noted the embassy staff seemed overjoyed the Marines had arrived.²⁴⁷

The 22d MEU staff formed a joint operations center forward at the embassy. Colonel Forbush's main headquarters remained on board the *Guam* to minimize the footprint ashore. The evacuation control center, a detachment of nine Marines from MSSG-22, set up in the embassy's dining facility and went to work processing evacuees. At 1415, with his forward deployed headquarters ashore, Colonel Forbush officially assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. Most of the approximately 1,970 personnel of the 22d MEU (SOC), which was composed of BLT 2/2, MSSG-22, and HMM-162, remained afloat.²⁴⁸

The next day the joint task force established a forward support base at Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The forward support base, coordinated by Captain White, was the nexus of all traffic in and out of Liberia. Using the same evacuation routing established by the previous joint task force, the Navy-run forward support base transferred evacuees from helicopters to awaiting aircraft that flew to the safe haven in Dakar, Senegal.

On 22 April, Marine helicopters flew Ambassador William H. Twadell (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) and his inter-agency support team to the embassy. The team, which included Major General Michael J. Byron, Vice Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff, conducted discussions with West African field commander General John M. Inenger at his headquarters, and later with factional leaders. During their two-day visit, meetings with the peacekeepers centered on the West African force's efforts to restore order and a proposed U.S. aid package of \$30 million to assist peacekeeping operations. Colonel Forbush and Captain Paul A. Shelton, the MEU's assistant intelligence officer, accompanied the team when it visited the

peacekeeping force's headquarters. Frank comments by the Nigerian commander gave Colonel Forbush an excellent understanding of the peacekeepers' disposition and desires. The Nigerian general requested a long list of military equipment support, including McDonnell Douglas AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships.²⁴⁹ Given the peacekeeper's historically poor maintenance and limited logistical capabilities, the request for Apache helicopters did not receive serious consideration.

Colonel Forbush flew to Freetown the next day and held a component commander's conference at the forward support base. At the 24 April meeting, he passed on General Joulwan's intent to reduce the overall force and presence ashore and to redeploy all remaining special operations troops. The reduced Air Force component of the special operations force briefed their ongoing redeployment plans. The joint task force would retain two Air Force AC-130 gunships for on-call support, but by 28 April the Air Force component's AC-130s had left Freetown. The Navy com-



Photo courtesy of the authors

Replacing U.S. Army soldiers, Marines of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit set up a sniper position on the grounds of the American Embassy. The M40A1 sniper rifle pictured here was based on the Remington model 700 and was manufactured by specially trained Marine Corps armorers.



Photo courtesy of the authors

The joint task force commander, Col Melvin W. Forbush, briefs key task force personnel at the forward support base in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Decisions made at the meeting reduced the force's footprint ashore.

ponent would keep one Lockheed EP-3 for reconnaissance and a two-helicopter detachment for support on station.

Expanded from what the Marines defended in 1990, the embassy grounds in 1996 included the former British Embassy within its boundaries. The Marines at the embassy quartered themselves in available rooms throughout the compound. The joint task force forward, housed in the chancellery, occupied a majority of the ground floor. Company F set up most of its defensive positions away from the boundary of the embassy, primarily located on top of buildings with views of United Nations Drive.

The Marines worked on improving and adding positions during the first week. One position was established on the second floor of the Ambassador's quarters, which was formerly the British Embassy. The expanded U.S. Embassy boundary faced the end of a natural avenue of approach from the east up Sekou Toure Drive and United Nations Drive.²⁵⁰ Any American property, however, drew displaced Liberians like a magnet. By now more than 20,000 Liberians had gathered in

the nearby U.S.-controlled Greystone compound looking for a safe haven from the violence. Ghanaian mediators for the Economic Community of West African States negotiated a truce on 20 April, and the Krahn released 78 foreigners held at the Barclay Training Center. The Liberians began a limited clean up of the city, although marauding fighters continued moving about. During the next few days the MEU's intelligence section received reports of more NPFL fighters and heavy weapons, including mortars, entering the city, while Krahn factions remained at the Barclay Training Center.²⁵¹

Marines Return Fire

On 27 April, Company G relieved Company F and improved the new defensive positions, including building dummy positions. The company commander, Captain Jeffrey J. Kenney, knew the terrain quite well after deploying to Liberia as a company executive officer in 1990 during Operation Sharp Edge.

Serious fighting started up again on 28 and 29

April.²⁵² Stray rounds constantly passed over the heads of the Marines and fighters in stolen vehicles or on foot frequently passed in front of the Marine positions brandishing and pointing their weapons at the Marines, who often responded with stern warnings. Although the fighters congregated close to the embassy and attempted to provoke the Marines, the Marines clearly understood the rules of engagement, which allowed the Marines to return fire if fired upon, or if the fighters showed hostile intent. While the pointing of weapons was common in Liberian culture, the Marines could easily have interpreted the action as a hostile intent. But the Marines on post exhibited considerable restraint.

A pattern of fighting soon developed near the embassy. The NPFL normally received ammunition the night before a fight. Then the next day, late in the morning, the NPFL would attack to the east. Later in the day, the Krahn would push them back west toward the embassy. When it was over, both sides would return to their assembly areas only to start the performance again the next day.²⁵³

On 30 April, earlier than normal, the Marines heard automatic weapons fire and explosions in the city. The Krahn were attempting to break out of the Barclay Training Center. Marines reported heavy fire, concentrated outside the southern half of the embassy opposite Post Seven at the facility maintenance building, and Post Eight at the Ambassador's residence. At about 0845, 25 to 30 NPFL fighters armed with AK-47s and several rocket launchers assembled in the open field to the east of the embassy and moved east toward the Barclay Training Center. A short time later, about 15 to 20 more NPFL fighters followed. The Marines watching knew something was about to happen.

At 1030, several heavy bursts of fire hit a cluster of shanties outside the fence line near the Ambassador's residence. Civilians living there ran for cover or fled in terror. Marines from the 2d Platoon watched as a group of NPFL fighters congregating on United Nations Drive about 400 meters from the southern part of the embassy and started moving toward the beach. The fighters' target appeared about 300 to 500 meters out in the water. Six to 10 persons rowing frantically in a canoe were apparently trying to paddle around Mamba Point. The NPFL fighters moved along the beach, chasing and shooting at the canoe. Marines of the 2d Platoon warned the first group of about a dozen fighters to turn around when

they reached an area below the embassy fence line, but the NPFL fighters continued to fire. Captain Kenney at Post Eight yelled: "You guys can't go there!" The fighters paused and their leader demanded passage to shoot the men in the canoe. Kenney, now near the chain link fence, told the NPFL leader to leave and the Marines would take care of the men if the canoes landed. The Marines knew if the men in the canoe returned fire, the embassy and their positions would be in the line of fire. A Marine ordered the squad accompanying the company commander to chamber their rounds and train their weapons on the fighters. The audible sound of chambering rounds convinced the NPFL leader to back down. Apparently satisfied, he thanked the company commander and ordered his men to withdraw to a building behind the old national public health



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine
Battalion Landing Team 2/2 Marines not only improved existing defensive positions such as the one atop the main building of the American Embassy, but also built new ones, including dummy positions.



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

Marines manning the American Embassy's front gate had a bulletproof-window view of the constant chaos along United Nations Drive.

services building, which the Marines called the "I-Hop." After the incident, the 2d Platoon's area in the southern half of the embassy settled down for about an hour.²⁵⁴ Around 1200, Marines again heard the sound of gunfire to the north of the I-Hop building. By about 1245, fire echoed throughout the embassy compound as skirmishing started outside while refugees streamed past.

By 1310, a number of firefights broke out near the embassy. With all Marines on post alerted and many observing the fire and rocket explosions, reports from the Marines flooded the command post. Post Eight, a sandbagged balcony on the second floor of the Ambassador's residence, offered a good view of the southern sector of United Nations Drive. A surveillance and target acquisition team headed by Corporal Jason S. Farrand, a trained scout sniper, manned the post. Corporal Farrand's Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle lay positioned between himself and First Lieutenant Aaron E. Bennett, the surveillance and target acquisition platoon commander.* Lieutenant

Bennett had gone to the post to relieve one of the team members. Both watched as a firefight erupted about 150 meters to their front. While behind his rifle and observing the firefight through the rifle's scope, Corporal Farrand moved his eyes off the scope to observe the origins of a shot just fired to his left. The ricocheting round grazed Corporal Farrand's collarbone, continued into the inside collar of his flak jacket, and dropped to the ground. The impact caused him to drop his weapon, fall backward and break the leg of the chair on which he sat. "It felt like a huge steel ball hit my shoulder," Farrand commented. Farrand got up and ripped off his flak jacket to check his wound. Nearby Marines pushed the corporal back down for his own protection and after a quick assessment by a corpsman, Farrand left for the battalion aid station. Post Eight Marines believed a stray round caused the incident, so they did not return fire.

Corporal Farrand returned to the post after a corpsman cleaned the wound. Farrand came back because he thought "they were going to try and evacuate me to the ship," and he wanted to be with his team because he "knew something was going to happen." After the incident, Captain

* The Barrett M82A1A Special Application Scoped Rifle (SASR) is a semi-automatic sniper rifle chambered for the .50-caliber, Browning machine gun cartridge.

Kenney told all posts over the radio to exercise caution and watch out for “flagging.”*

Adding to the Marines concern, 100 or so refugees had gathered along the western fence line to avoid the shooting. At around 1400, Marines spotted a group of about 10 NPFL fighters moving up Sekou Toure Drive. Corporal William A. Gardner, 2d Platoon’s 3d Squad leader, was checking his men’s positions at Post Seven and Seven Bravo and he watched from Seven Bravo as the fighters advanced in quasi-tactical formation toward the embassy. Marine combat engineers had built post Seven Bravo, a sand-bagged position on top of the roof of the facility maintenance building, just the day before. When the NPFL squad reached the area around Gibson Street, about a block from the embassy, one fighter aimed and fired at the position. The round hit the plywood support for the sand bagged walls about six inches from Corporal Gardner and Lance Corporal Wade M. Ward, a squad M249 automatic weapon gunner. Plywood splinters from the round hit Lance Corporal Ward in the cheek. After dropping for cover, Gardner immediately ordered the Marines on post to return fire. Popping back up, the Marines returned fire using M16s, an M60 machine gun, and an M249, killing at least three of the NPFL. Gardner yelled cease-fire and the Marines immediately reloaded. One fighter lying in a prone position in the street fired a round at the Marines. Gardner ordered his machine gunner to fire again and the impact of the rounds flipped the militiaman onto his back. After calling a second ceasefire, the squad leader and his Marines watched two fighters, with arms raised high, cautiously move toward the bodies in the street and drag off two of the wounded. Other fighters stripped the dead of their weapons and boots and the survivors fled the scene.²⁵⁵

Indiscriminate fire continued to strike the area around Post Seven from an unknown location. At 1500, a group of fighters again fired on Post Seven, but the Marines were unable to locate the source and did not return fire. Interspersed with civilian refugees, a different group of NPFL fighters, who had not engaged the Marines, retreated from the area of the I-Hop building toward the embassy. Wanting no trouble, they flashed peace signs and pointed their weapons away from the

* Flagging was a slang term used by the Marines of 22d MEU to describe a factional fighter’s action of pointing his weapon at Marines.



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine
A battalion landing team Marine patrols the fence line of the American Embassy compound, which had been extended to incorporate the British Embassy.

compound as they ran past along United Nations Drive.²⁵⁶

At 1515, a group of 40 to 50 Krahn fighters fired from the hip as they moved west by squads on United Nations Drive. The Krahns pursued a ragged group of NPFL fighters who started running north along United Nations Drive and then through the open field in front of Post Eight to escape the fire. After dispersing the group, the lead element of the Krahn force hesitated, regrouped, and moved north. Captain Kenney, on Post Eight, yelled at the lead fighter to stop. Just 35 meters from the post on the other side of the wall, the lead fighter, who was wearing white shorts, grinned at Kenney and fired his weapon at the Marines. After taking a burst of machine gun fire, Captain Kenney gave the command to fire. Marines on Post Eight and other nearby positions opened fire on the lead fighter, who immediately dropped for cover.

Using a Barrett sniper rifle, a Marine engaged a fighter popping up and shooting from the ruins across the street. After a few shots, the fighter



USS *Guam* (LPH 9) MARG 1-96 Deployment Cruise Book

A Marine sniper fires from a fortified position in the upper floors of the American Embassy's main building. To minimize civilian casualties, fire was restricted to ferreting out opposing snipers in the buildings across United Nations Drive.

staggered out and the Marines followed up with a burst of M60 machine gun fire. One fighter attempted to engage the Marines with a rocket-propelled grenade, but was hit by a Marine sniper's round. After exchanging fire with the Marines for some time, the Krahn withdrew. Some of the fighters used civilians as shields as they moved back to the east behind the I-Hop building, while others dragged their wounded away. Krahn casualties numbered at least one killed and four wounded.

Six of the withdrawing Krahn marksmen positioned themselves in the I-Hop building and engaged Post Seven and Post Eight with small arms fire. Not wanting to cause civilian casualties, Captain Kenney restricted fire to well aimed shots to ferret out the snipers. Marines, including Corporal Farrand, returned fire. Employing a Barrett sniper rifle, an M40A1 sniper rifle, and M16A2 rifles, they left at least two dead on an outside staircase and second story balcony of the I-

Hop building. The disciplined fire drove the last few fighters away around 1545.²⁵⁷

After Company G's effective response, Mamba Point became unusually calm. The embassy's local guard project manager, Hershel Hernandez, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, went out and physically verified at least six dead and numerous blood trails from skirmishes. The bodies of the dead remained untouched in the street for the rest of the day. That evening, in deference to the Marines, NPFL fighters needing resupply called the embassy to request permission to drive by in two vehicles. Fighters gathered at the I-Hop building but did not come near the Marines. From then on, the fighters avoided pointing weapons at the Marines and many times would raise them over their heads to signify peaceful intentions as they approached the embassy. The NPFL later called the embassy to claim its leaders did not launch the attack against the Marines and recommended roadblocks at both ends of the streets approach-

ing the embassy to prevent any misunderstandings. At the direction of the regional security officer, the embassy's local guards erected unmanned roadblocks to reroute the fighters away from the embassy.²⁵⁸

However, automatic weapon fire still echoed throughout the city, especially near Barclay Training Center where machine gun and rocket-propelled grenades slammed into the training center's grounds as doctors treated wounded fighters. As a result of the violence, Mr. George Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs working at the embassy, called off negotiations. After consulting with the Ambassador and Mr. Moose, Colonel Forbush received permission from European Command to move the *Guam*, *Trenton*, and *Portland* within sight of the city. Both Colonel Forbush and Ambassador Milam thought the movement would allow a quick turnaround if an evacuation became necessary. After the firefights the day before, the demonstration of

the naval presence gave a visible reminder of the strength of Joint Task Force Assured Response. Charles Taylor called the Ambassador to express his concern about the proximity of the ships. Sensitive to the political implications, European Command on 2 May ordered the joint task force to move the ships back over the horizon.²⁵⁹

Marines from Company G rotated out on 3 May as Company E Marines moved into defensive positions around the embassy. The same day, Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J), with a West African escort, left the Barclay Training Center in an armored car and headed for the U.S. Embassy. The Economic Community of West African States delegation had made the offer to evacuate him earlier, but the economic community-sponsored peace talks scheduled for 7 and 8 May in Accra, Ghana, afforded him a plausible reason to leave. While awaiting evacuation by Marine helicopter to Sierra Leone, Johnson actually apologized to the MEU commander for his fighters engaging the



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

Manning Post Five, a .50-caliber heavy machine gun position on the balcony of one of the American Embassy's residences, Marines cover a likely avenue of approach combatants might use to storm the compound.

Americans. The Marine helicopter then flew Johnson to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where a Ghanaian aircraft delivered him to Accra, Ghana.²⁶⁰

The tempo of fighting ashore slowed as the NPFL considered the latest ceasefire offer. But the NPFL soon rejected that offer and attacked the Krahns. Fighters loyal to Roosevelt Johnson continued the battle at the Barclay Training Center. By Sunday, 5 May, Johnson's Krahns broke out of the besieged Barclay Training Center. Burning, looting, and fighting went on throughout the city during the weekend.

Around noon on 6 May, a group of retreating NPFL engaged a group of Krahns advancing westward along Sekou Toure Drive on Mamba Point. During this advance, the Krahns repeatedly engaged Marine positions with fire, especially Post Seven. Manning the sector were Marines from Company E's 3d Platoon, who returned fire with automatic weapons. The Krahns changed their route of advance and moved north on Gibson Street. Neither side took casualties.²⁶¹

Since the beginning of Assured Response, the amphibious ready group and the MEU had conducted split operations in consideration of the Sixth Fleet's exercise schedule. The exercises, combined with the orders to reduce the forces ashore and overall Assured Response presence, resulted in Marines from BLT 2/2 cross-decking. Specifically, on 8 May, Company D (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Company E, 2/2, and Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, left the *Guam* and the *Portland* and transferred to the *Trenton*. The *Trenton* left for the coast of Spain to join with the repaired *Tortuga*, and there participate in Exercise Matador 96. The *Guam* and the *Portland* remained on station off the Liberian coast. The Nigerian registered freighter *Bulk Challenge* also remained in West African waters. After leaving Liberia overloaded with refugees, other West African countries had refused to grant the ship safe harbor in their ports.²⁶²

Thousands fled as thick clouds of smoke hung over the city. With all aid and relief agencies gone, the situation in the city approached disaster



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

During lulls in the fighting, Marines check evacuees waiting for an inbound helicopter, which flew them to safety in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

level with an estimated 60,000 people displaced by the fighting and the Liberians reporting cases of cholera. The calls for a ceasefire at the Economic Community of West African States summit on 7 and 8 May in Accra, Ghana, went unheeded. Sporadic firing continued throughout the Mamba Point area. At the embassy, Company F took over from Company E on 9 May, but the situation remained tense. On 11 May, numerous stray rounds again flew overhead with one round grazing a sergeant's biceps as he walked between posts.

Colonel Forbush called the fighting on 15 May the heaviest he had seen up to that time. Evacuee numbers increased proportionally. During the next several days, fighters from the NPFL launched attacks against the Barclay Training Center in another attempt to dislodge the ULIMO-J and Krahn's. Ironically, Charles Taylor had announced earlier he had ordered his NPFL fighters to withdraw from the city. Fighters commanded by "General Butt Naked," a *nom de guerre* of one of the NPFL leaders, conducted frenzied assaults against the Krahn's in the Mamba Point district. Taking and holding no ground, they would withdraw by mid-day and leave the dead where they lay.²⁶³

On 18 May, the Mamba Point fighting moved close to Gate One of the embassy in the area the Marines called Crack Alley. Fighting erupted next to the Greystone compound late in the morning. The skirmish resulted in more than 30 rocket-propelled grenade explosions that sent the Marines ducking for cover. The Marines watched fighters shoot at each other at point blank range as the fighting took place up and down the alley. Krahn fighters attempted to seize the house of Charles Taylor's mother, while others requested permission to use United Nations Drive to outflank their NPFL enemy. Marines on post refused, and the fighters turned around and went back into the alley. One rocket-propelled grenade exploded inside the embassy compound near Gate One, wounding a civilian embassy employee. Marines then observed executions of prisoners by the NPFL who dumped the bodies on the beach near the embassy.

Reduction of Marine Forces

Although the West African peacekeepers set up checkpoints in the city, their troops repeatedly retreated when fighting flared up. The peace-

keepers' commander, not satisfied with the support he was receiving, stated on 20 May that his force, which numbered around 7,500, required twice the number of peacekeepers than it currently had.²⁶⁴ With promises of American funds and logistical support, the peacekeeping force deployed throughout the city in mid-May to regain control. They manned checkpoints north and south of the embassy. In a radio broadcast, the force's field commander stated that from then on his troops would allow no guns on the streets and insisted that all fighters leave the city. Responding by radio broadcast, Charles Taylor's NPFL and Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K said they would observe the order and withdrew some forces from the city. The fighting died down and the peacekeeping force exerted its authority by seizing weapons caches. The Marines continued to observe fighters, but they carried no weapons. Many of the displaced began returning home and the number of persons at the embassy's Greystone compound dropped. Incidental fire by 24 May ceased around the embassy. Two days later, the peacekeeping force completed its redeployment throughout the city.²⁶⁵ When Colonel Forbush reconnoitered the city by embassy vehicle on 31 May, he believed the fighting had essentially stopped.

The beginning of June saw Liberians clearing debris and sweeping streets. Volunteers and health worker also started digging up the hundreds of hastily buried corpses. Starvation, disease, and wounds from the fighting accounted for most of the dead. The standoff at the Barclay Training Center was settled when the fighters of Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO-J left unarmed. The ethnic Krahn's, one of the seven factions in Liberia's six-year-old civil war, agreed to disarm. As a result of the Ghanaian-led economic community negotiations, 500 Krahn fighters safely withdrew from the Barclay Training Center and turned over a token number of weapons.²⁶⁶ Marines at the embassy remained vigilant with Company G rotating in and Company F leaving the compound. Evacuation flights slowed, and by 7 June, the last evacuees left from the embassy. The Marines enjoyed the city's calm. The quiet allowed the Ambassador to take leave and the II Marine Expeditionary Force commander was able to visit the Marines ashore. About this time, a maintenance problem arose involving the swash plates on CH-53E helicopters. The problem grounded all of the MEU's CH-53Es. Colonel Forbush, as the joint task force commander,



Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck* magazine

While fighting and chaos reigned, Marines of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 continued to evacuate civilians and foreign nationals by CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters.

ordered the *Guam* to remain at Mamba Station so the pilots could test the helicopters once mechanics made the repairs. Because the Sixth Fleet had previously scheduled the *Guam*'s departure, Forbush's decision created a furor at Sixth Fleet headquarters, which communicated its displeasure to the highest command levels. Since Sixth Fleet was not in the operational chain-of-command, the issue of whether the joint task force commander could control the deployment of his ships constituted a sore point with Colonel Forbush. The question of who was the supporting command (Sixth Fleet), and who was the supported command (22d MEU) came up on at least three occasions. All three times when Colonel Forbush mentioned ship movements, calls came from the Sixth Fleet, and it seemed as though the relationship was reversed. Fortunately, by 22

June, Marines of HMM-162 received the parts to fix the problem, which allowed the testing of the aircraft before the planned departure.²⁶⁷

On 14 June, the joint task force-sponsored Air Force assessment team confirmed that Spriggs-Payne Airport was capable of landing C-130 aircraft. Commercial air traffic subsequently resumed on 17 June in Monrovia, thus ending the need for Marine evacuation flights. The next day during the turnover of rifle companies, HMM-162 extracted six fast attack vehicles from the embassy in anticipation of the turnover. By this time, the 22d MEU had evacuated 49 Americans and 260 third-country nationals from the embassy. With a special purpose air-ground task force steaming to Liberia, the *Portland* departed on 20 June. The ship's departure left only the *Guam* to represent the ARG in Liberian waters.²⁶⁸

Chapter 6

Operation Quick Response

Violence to the East

While the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted operations in Liberia, another threat to Americans developed in the Central African Republic, which is situated on the eastern boundary of the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility. Spanning an area slightly smaller than the state of Texas, the country borders Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and Zaire. With a population of a little more than 3 million, this landlocked country joins the Sudanese savanna zone to the Congo River basin. Nearly half of the Central African Republic's population is ethnically Banda and Baya, but most political leaders have come from the smaller Obangui-region tribes. Sangho constitutes the national language, with only a small portion of the population speaking French, the official language.²⁶⁹ The Central African Republic's transportation system is poor—it is in fact one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world. External trade relies on the Obangui River, which forms the country's southern boundary. Major exports include diamonds, cotton, and timber. Agricultural goods account for half of the gross domestic product and the majority of the populace works in agricultural production. In May of 1996, approximately 2,500 French and 254 Americans lived in the Central African Republic.²⁷⁰

Once the Oubangui-chari territory of French Equatorial Africa, the Central African Republic achieved independence in 1960. The first non-colonial ruler of the Central African Republic was the democratically elected David Dako. In 1966, Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokassa displaced his cousin Dako by coup d'etat. A former French colonial soldier, Bokassa became President in 1967, President for life in 1972, and crowned himself Emperor Bokassa I in 1976, renaming the country the Central African Empire. Bokassa's complete

disregard for any democratic sentiments spurred a successful counter-coup in 1979 by Dacko. French military units assisted in the coup, Operation Barracuda, after learning of Bokassa's orders that resulted in the massacre of hundreds of school children.*

In 1981, General Andre-Dieudonne Kolingba led the country's military in another coup. Kolingba became the leader of the Central African Republic and his policies led the country into economic stagnation. Strong internal opposition and French pressure resulted in legislative elections in 1987 and a presidential election in 1993.²⁷¹ Elected president in 1993, Ange-Felix Patasse replaced Kolingba's regime with a coalition government. The new president's plans for restructuring and decentralizing the government provoked opposition, especially from the unions, which demanded back salaries. The currency devaluation of other French-speaking African nations in 1994 further aggravating the situation by causing a 45 percent inflation of the country's currency. When Patasse's government found it impossible to pay salaries, civil servants, health workers, and teachers responded with protests, riots, and work stoppages.²⁷²

A security agreement between France and the Central African Republic, which was made when the republic proclaimed its independence, allowed for the stationing of French troops in the country. The military contingent numbered approximately 1,300 men spread out between numerous garrisons. Camp Bealle and M'Poko military bases constituted the major facilities in the city of Bangui. The aviation detachment at M'Poko Airfield included four Areospace SA-330

* Jean-Bedel Bosska's brutality included the torturing, killing, and even eating of slain political opponents. Julian Nundy, "Cannibal Emperor Buried With Honors in Central African Republic, (Electronic Telegraph, 5Nov96, issue 531.)



Puma helicopters, five Mirage fighters, and two Transall C-160 cargo aircraft.²⁷³ Although the French presence was a source of frequent nationalist agitation, the Patasse government depended heavily on security assistance from the French troops.²⁷⁴

* The French signed the 1960 defense agreement with four countries in the region. After the 1966 coup d'etat, the new president, Andre Kolingba, demanded a revision to the accord. In October 1966, the military cooperation accord signed in Paris allowed for two bases, one at Bangui and the other at Bour, and the stationing of 1,400 French military personnel in the country. The French called the force the French Operational Assistance Elements (EFAO).

On 18 April 1996, armed rebellion broke out. The incident started with a protest by 80 soldiers who had not received pay. The group of mutineers, soldiers mainly from Kolingba's Yakoma tribe and Bokassa's Gbaka tribe, fortified their barracks at Camp Du Kassai in the capital, Bangui.²⁷⁵ The number of mutineers quickly grew to 400 as they seized a number of key installations in the city. In the ensuing fight a number of civilians caught in the crossfire were killed or wounded. President Patasse deployed the presidential guard battalion in hopes of disarming the soldiers, but the move resulted in more bloodshed. Because of the presidential guard's failure, Patasse fled to the French garrison. French Foreign

Legionnaires deployed from Camp Bealle, and after some minor skirmishing, restored order on 20 April. After escorting the mutineers back to their base, negotiations between the soldiers and the government occurred and France provided financial aid to help pay the soldier's salaries.²⁷⁶

On 18 May, a unit of the presidential guard battalion attempted to take control of an armory from the former mutineers. The soldiers reacted violently, breaking into the armory, seizing weapons, and forcing the presidential guard unit to withdraw. Fighting broke out in the city the following day, some of it taking place in front of the U.S. Embassy. French units deployed to protect French property and the Presidential Palace. Civil control broke down as rebelling soldiers and rioters looted commercial districts and private residences. Rebel soldiers established roadblocks and robbed travelers at gunpoint. This effectively closed the route to the airport, where commercial air traffic ceased.²⁷⁷ The revolt gained momentum as the rebels seized the city's main fuel depot and the national radio station, which was close to the U.S. Embassy. Public transportation ground to a halt; shops, schools, and markets closed, and most of the people remained indoors. Stray bullets struck the U.S. Embassy and the staff received numerous reports of fighting and looting near American residences.

French troops retook the radio station killing nine rebels. French armored personnel vehicles patrolled the streets on Monday, 20 May, to rescue and round up roughly 1,000 foreigners caught up in the violence. While negotiations started between President Patasse and the mutineers, clashes occurred between presidential units and the rebels. The mutineers, mainly from the combined arms regiment, numbered approximately 500. In response to the increased violence some French units withdrew to Camp Bealle and M'Poko Airfield.²⁷⁸

The French decided to send military reinforcements to the Central African Republic, initially from the surrounding sub-Saharan states hosting French units, Gabon and Chad. Christened Operation Almandin II, the French commander, General Bernard Thorette, headed for the Central African Republic with other reinforcements from France.²⁷⁹ Troops already in Bangui deployed to support the Patasse government and prevent the mutiny from escalating into a coup before Thorette's reinforcements could arrive.

After seeing gun battles in front of the U.S. Embassy and receiving reports of Americans

being accosted in their homes and on the street, Ambassador Mosina H. Jordan requested the State Department authorize an ordered departure of numerous U.S. Government personnel and American citizens. The request included asking for security support and military transportation to assist in the evacuation. As the violence spread throughout the city, the embassy advised Americans unable to leave their homes to remain indoors.

When the revolt broke out on 18 June, the European Command's theater command center, a 24-hour operations center, monitored the crisis. After receiving authorization from national command authority, European Command began contingency discussions with the French military concerning the safety of U.S. citizens. Marine Brigadier General David M. Mize, the deputy operations officer for European Command, flew to Paris to coordinate the military action.²⁸⁰ The French agreed to cooperate and assist in the evac-



uation. As the fighting escalated, Secretary of State Warren Christopher commented: "It's a violent situation; we're concerned about American personnel and we're trying to do everything we can to ensure their safety and to evacuate those who can leave."²⁸¹

The French agreed to transport American evacuees to collection points from which they would proceed to the main evacuation point at M'Poko Airfield. From there, U.S. aircraft would fly the evacuees to the designated safe haven, Yaounde, Cameroon. The French further agreed to evacuate Americans from remote sites using their helicopters or cargo transport aircraft and to assist a small American force designated to provide security for the embassy in Bangui.²⁸² The U.S. Embassy in the capital city of Bangui had not had a Marine security guard detachment since 1993. Only unarmed local contract guards provided security. The nearest diplomatic security support, a regional security officer, resided in another country.²⁸³

Call in the Marines

At 0700, 20 May, the commander of Joint Task Force Assured Response, Colonel Forbush, received a call from Brigadier General Mize at European Command. As commanding officer of the 22d MEU, Colonel Forbush had already split his forces between Liberia and the Mediterranean to provide security, sustainability, and evacuation assistance to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, while simultaneously conducting exercises and training in support of U.S. Sixth Fleet commitments. General Mize was familiar with these dispositions, having just returned from a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia.²⁸⁴ The two officers focused their discussion on the crisis in the Central African Republic. In a verbal warning order, General Mize told Colonel Forbush to prepare Marines for deployment to the capital city, Bangui, to assist in the possible evacuation of U.S. citizens. The Marines would protect the embassy until an ordered departure took place or until other forces relieved them. In addition, the Marine force would offer military advice to the Ambassador, maintain liaison with the French forces, and provide for the logistical sustaining of the embassy.²⁸⁵

Already ashore at the embassy in Monrovia, Colonel Forbush talked with Captain Richard E. Luehrs, II, telling him that he would deploy to the Central African Republic. Captain Luehrs, the officer-in-charge of the air, naval gunfire liaison company detachment, flew back to the USS

Guam (LPH 9) with Colonel Forbush.²⁸⁶ That evening, as General Mize released the European Command's warning and execute orders, the joint task force's operation was well underway.²⁸⁷

On board the *Guam* off the coast of Liberia, Colonel Forbush called his key staff together and they immediately began planning and alerting units. The agreement with the French allowed for a small Marine security and liaison group. Initially, 35 Marines and sailors would make up the Marine security and liaison team. The 81mm mortar platoon of Weapons Company, Battalion Landing Team 2/2 (BLT 2/2), received word it would provide security and evacuation control. Colonel Forbush picked Major Norman J. Robison to command the mission, now designated Operation Quick Response. Major Robison, originally from Marine Forces Atlantic, Standing Joint Task Force, had joined Joint Task Force Assured Response to assist.²⁸⁸

To get the Marines to Bangui, located almost 200 miles from the task force's location, required using the 22d MEU's KC-130 detachment. The two-plane detachment arrived in theater in April to support a scheduled training exercise and remained there to support Operation Assured Response in Liberia. A little after 0700 on 20 May, one of the detachment's aircraft started its engines to conduct a routine resupply flight on the airfield tarmac at Rota, Spain. While the engines were running and the crew worked on a small maintenance problem, the pilot, Captain David A. Krebs, received an order to shut down the aircraft. Over the radio, the 22d MEU contact stated Krebs would fly to a capital that began with the letter "B." Returning to the detachment's office, Captain Krebs and Major John T. Collins, the detachment commander, determined their destination was Bangui.²⁸⁹ The joint task force's air combat element operations officer then provided additional information and tasking. Although the task force staff was still developing the plan, the operations officer told Krebs the mission called for him to fly 3,000 miles from Rota, Spain, to Dakar, Senegal, and then to Freetown, Sierra Leone. The aircraft was expected to remain overnight at Dakar before picking up Marines in Sierra Leone. Once at Lungi Airfield in Sierra Leone, it would pick up awaiting Marines who would provide liaison, evacuation control, and security for the U.S. Embassy, and fly them to Bangui, Central African Republic.²⁹⁰ Major Collins, needing detailed information on Bangui, requested charts of the Bangui airfield from his parent squadron, Marine Aerial Refuelling



Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

Capt David A. Krebs (left) and Capt Homer W. Nesmith stand with the crew of the first Marine Refueler Transport Squadron 252 Lockheed KC-130 Hercules aircraft to land at M'Poko Airport in Bangui, Central African Republic, following a long flight from Rota, Spain, by way of Dakar, Senegal, and Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Squadron 252 (VMGR-252), located at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina. The detachment's intelligence chief also visited the Navy's Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 2 (VQ-2), at Rota, to gather information about the fighting.²⁹¹

Launching at 1100, the KC-130's crew did not have all the information on the mission, as the task force staff was still in the process of developing it. Once in the air, Major Collins received word that after refueling in Dakar and loading in Freetown, his aircraft would continue on to Bangui. Colonel Forbush decided to extend the crew day, normally 12 hours, to accomplish the task.* The stop in Dakar, Senegal, allowed only enough time to refuel and pick up a fax from Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, which contained airfield approach and information for Bangui.²⁹²

Back on the *Guam*, the Marine security and liaison team received a briefing by Major Robison

* If an aircraft with autopilot takes off before 0500, the flight time for a crew can be extended to 18 hours. With an augmented crew, maximum flight time per day is 24 hours. (VMGR-252 Det A, "KC-130 Gouge," 20Jun96 [Assured Response Collection, MCHC, Washington D.C.]

around noon and then drew weapons and ammunition.²⁹³ The security and evacuation control center Marines left the ship by CH-53E helicopters and arrived at Lungi Airfield at 1700 to wait for the KC-130. While at Lungi, the Marines formulated a detailed security plan for the embassy with the help of Staff Sergeant Scott T. Livengood, a former member of the Marine detachment in Bangui.²⁹⁴ The KC-130 arrived at 2000. Marines installed a satellite communication system (AN/PSC-3 radio) in the KC-130 using a hatch-mounted antenna. A communicator had joined the crew in Dakar to operate the system. The aircraft loaded the personnel, pallets of bottled water, and meals ready-to-eat for the evacuees and the Marines. After refueling, the flight departed at 2200 with no assurance of clearances to fly over Cameroon or to land in Bangui. As the plane headed for Bangui, the State Department worked on obtaining flight clearances, a process that normally took 36 to 72 hours. To avoid flying over countries for which clearances had not been obtained, the aircraft skirted the coast of West Africa in international airspace. To accomplish the mission, the pilots needed clearances from both Cameroon and Central African Republic.²⁹⁵ Thirty

minutes before crossing into Cameroon airspace, the aircraft's pilots learned they had received clearance to fly over Cameroon and land in the Central African Republic.²⁹⁶ As the KC-130 approached M'Poko Airfield from the south, the aircraft broke through the clouds and Major Collins observed the city for the first time, noting green tracer rounds crisscrossing the area.²⁹⁷

Marine Operations in Bangui

At 0600, The KC-130 landed at M'Poko Airfield. As it taxied to the French military compound, the pilot, Captain Krebs, noted numerous French fighting positions on the eastern side of the runway, which indicated the seriousness of the situation.²⁹⁸ As the plane taxied up the ramp, Captain Krebs and Major Collins saw crowds of people. The fenced-in compound located on the east side of the airfield, which normally contained 300 French military personnel, was crowded with more than 1,000 civilians awaiting evacuation. The majority were French nationals, but citizens of other nations, including Canada and Cameroon, had made their way to the compound. The French had evacuated several Americans, including Peace Corps volunteers from outlying sites, while others made it to the airport on their own. One American family told the Marines of rebel soldiers invading their home and stealing food and money. Other refugees described harassment by rampaging gangs of soldiers.²⁹⁹

Major Robison coordinated with waiting U.S. Embassy personnel and spoke with the French operational assistance element's command at M'Poko to arrange transportation. Several French military trucks arrived and the Marines embarked. Five Marines from MEU Service Support Group 22 and one corpsman, which comprised the evacuation control center, remained at the airfield under the leadership of First Sergeant Allan M. Slater. The other Marines, including a seven-man liaison element and an 18-man security element, moved by truck to Camp Bealle, escorted by French wheeled armored personnel carriers. Marines coordinated with the French at the camp and met their liaison officer, Captain Thierry Paquereau. Leaving for the embassy, the Marines made their way through the city but saw no rebels, nor did they hear any shooting. The temporary ceasefire in effect that morning contributed to a false sense of calm.³⁰⁰

Arriving at the embassy, Ambassador Jordan greeted the Marines, who immediately deployed

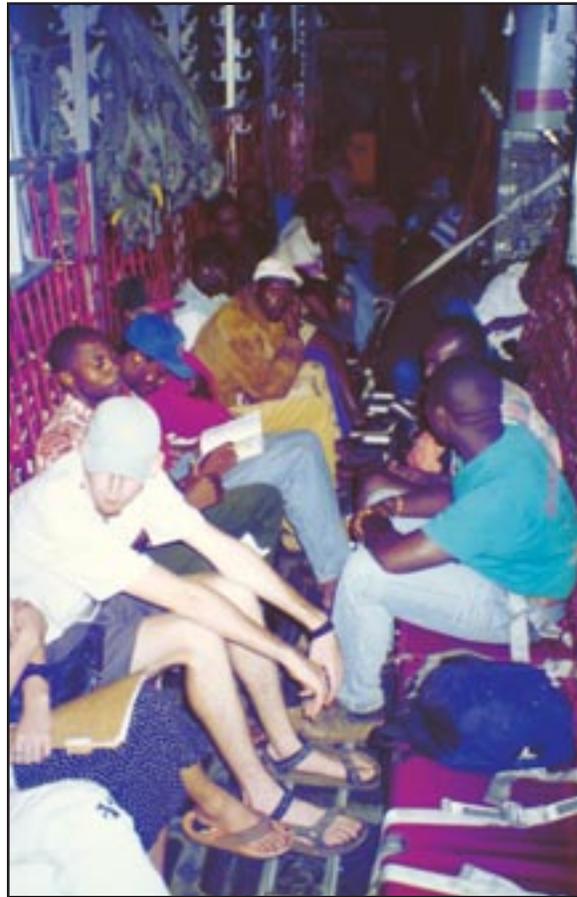


Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs
American Peace Corps volunteers and Cameroonian refugees crowd on board the first Marine KC-130 evacuation flight from Bangui to Yaounde, the capital of the Republic of Cameroon.

throughout the compound. Major Robison and his second in command, Captain Luehrs, received a brief on the current situation. After assessing its layout, the Marines initiated security patrols within the embassy compound. They also established two defensive positions, one on the chancery roof facing southward toward David Dacko Road, and the other atop the General Service Office maintenance building facing the opposite direction toward Avenue du 18 Victoire. As the Marines constructed positions with the help of local embassy workers, a lone rifleman in a building nearby took aim at the Marines. Six to eight Marines immediately reinforced the position and zeroed in on the rebel, who quickly placed his weapon down on the rooftop, waived a white flag, and retreated from the position. The Marines held their fire.³⁰¹

Back at the M'Poko Airfield, the aircrew realized no additional Americans would arrive any-

time soon. Calling back to the joint task force by established satellite communications, they asked for permission to depart. Captain Krebs wanted to get the evacuees and crew to Nsimalen Airfield in Yaounde, Cameroon, recognizing that remaining longer in Bangui would increase fatigue. After receiving permission, the KC-130 departed at 1130 with 13 evacuees, mainly Peace Corps volunteers and missionaries. When they landed at Nsimalen the crew-day had reached 36 hours with 18.3 hours of actual flying time. The American Ambassador in Cameroon and his staff greeted them. The embassy staff, expecting approximately 80 evacuees, quickly processed the 13 civilians while the crew and pilots contacted the joint task force and received tasking for the next day.³⁰²

In Bangui, a firefight broke out around the embassy at 1300. The rebels and the French employed automatic weapons and small arms fire. Multiple rocket-propelled grenade explosions, as well as the sound of .50-caliber machine gun fire from French armored personnel carriers, reverberated throughout the compound. Neither side

directed any fire toward the embassy. Later that afternoon, a number of extended firefights occurred at an intersection southeast of the embassy. Stray rounds flew overhead until midnight.³⁰³

At the airfield, First Sergeant Slater's evacuation control center processed arriving Americans throughout the first night. Early on the morning of 22 May, the KC-130 returned from Cameroon, taxiing to the civilian aircraft ramp in an area secured by French Foreign Legionnaires. When a firefight erupted between the rebels and loyalist troops at the end of the runway, the Legionnaires responded with machine gun fire and the shooting ceased.³⁰⁴

At 1400, the Marines moved a group of 77 Americans and third-country nationals to the awaiting KC-130. After all were on board, the aircraft, which was cleared for takeoff, experienced a "flame out" in its number two engine. The evacuees were offloaded and waited in the shade of the wings to protect them from temperatures of more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit. After deter-

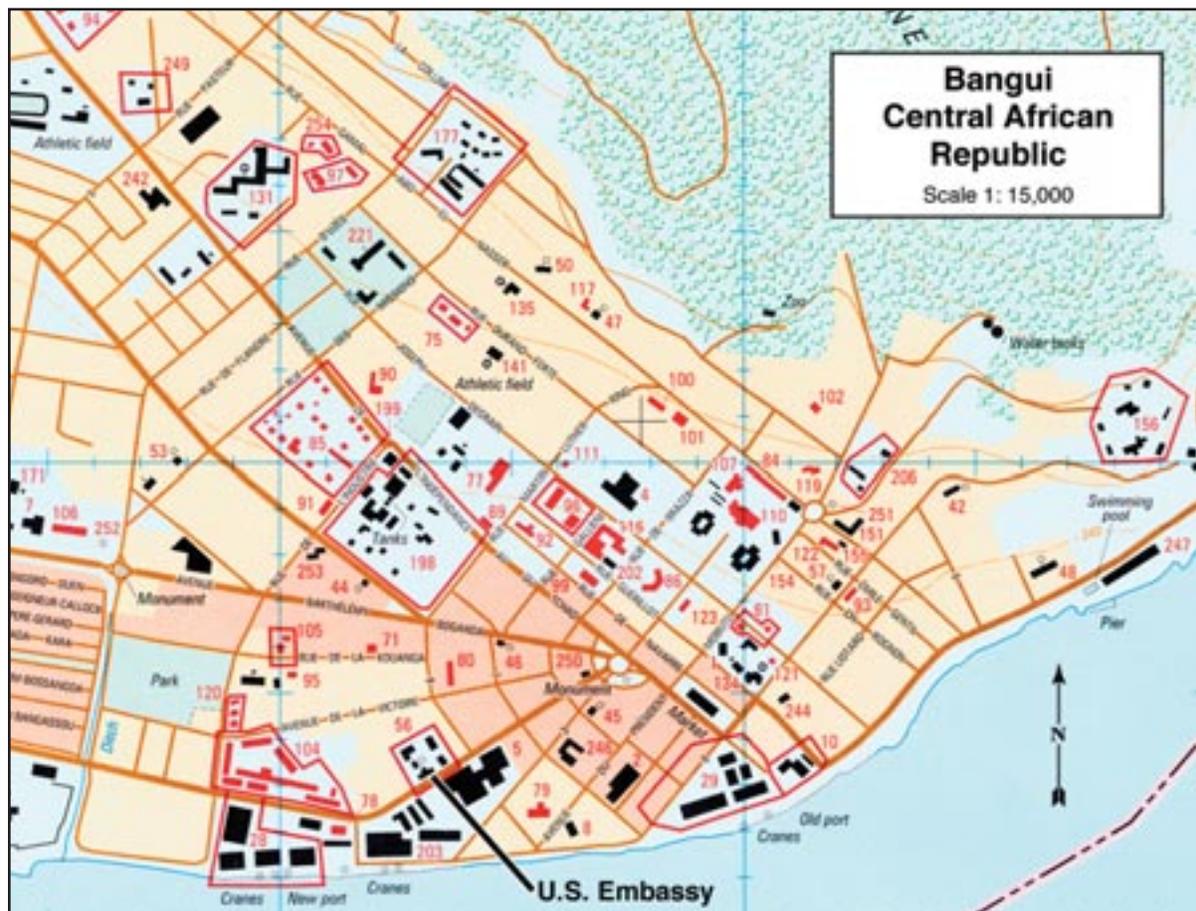




Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

American evacuees seek shelter from the heat under the wing of a KC-130 at M'Poko Airport shortly after the aircraft's number two engine flamed out during the power up in preparation for take off.

mining repairs were required, the pilots parked the plane at the terminal's civilian ramp.³⁰⁵

The evacuees and aircrew moved to a new evacuation control center located in a maintenance building where they remained until 2300 when a second KC-130 arrived from Rota, Spain.* A Cable News Network camera crew arrived and filmed the Marines as they offloaded supplies by hand.³⁰⁶ The French, meanwhile, evacuated civilians from the military camp with their own C-130 and C-160 cargo aircraft. At 0100 on 23 May, the new KC-130 departed for Nsimalen Airfield with 59 evacuees and most of the crew from the disabled aircraft.** A handful of Americans, anticipat-

ing the restoration of order, elected to remain at the evacuation control center.³⁰⁷

During the early morning of 22 May, shots again rang out near the U.S. Embassy. Marines later spotted 30 rebel troops operating in the vicinity. Fighting between the rebels, the presidential guard, and French troops broke out later that afternoon. The poorly trained rebels rarely shouldered their weapons, preferring to fire from the hip or raising the weapon overhead to fire. French Puma helicopter gunships flew overhead and engaged the rebel forces near the radio station. Stray rounds impacted the chancery's roof and outside walls. Nearby rocket-propelled grenade explosions kept the Marines on post vigilant. One government armored personnel carrier positioned itself near the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) facility next to the chancery. Marines soon heard its 20mm cannon fire at rebels, who responded with machine guns. The Marine reaction force quickly escorted embassy employees to safe locations within the compound. French Mirage jets, conducting reconnaissance flights, flew overhead. The day's fighting started a large fire in a building

* That same day, the 22d MEU received a U.S. European Command modification to the execute order that directed Joint Task Force Assured Response to conduct a noncombatant evacuation operation and assume control of one additional KC-130.

** Parts for the aircraft arrived the next day. The detachment swapped aircraft when two KC-130s from Detachment A, VMGR-252 arrived in Freetown shortly thereafter. The aircraft needed phase maintenance every 250 hours, which took about five days to accomplish. The 2d Marine Aircraft Wing normally planned the aircraft rotations for more in-depth routine maintenance.

close by, but the flames eventually subsided without damaging the compound.³⁰⁸

The embassy advised all American citizens to stay at home, but had neither an accurate roster for, nor the locations of, Peace Corps and USAID workers in the countryside.* The directors of both organizations, trapped in town, possessed this information and needed to bring it to the embassy. Major Robison coordinated their transportation with the French liaison officer, Captain Paquereau, and French soldiers escorted the Peace Corps and USAID directors to the embassy.³⁰⁹ Once at the embassy, the directors notified the remaining workers of the evacuation plan through an emergency recall system of radios and telephones.

At 0820 on 23 May, approximately 2,000 demonstrators arrived in front of the U.S. Embassy. Marines watched as the crowd shouted anti-French slogans and demanded President Patasse's departure. The demonstrators chanted pro-American slogans such as, "U.S. yes," and "United with you!" As the crowd conducted a sit-in, someone fired at the demonstrators and wounded two. The crowd attempted to move toward the French Embassy and Marines on Post One (the chancery) heard bursts of machine gun fire and a rocket-propelled grenade explosion. The crowd dispersed when French troops arrived. French patrols soon passed by the embassy and a firefight ensued in an area northeast of the embassy, dubbed "Hooterville" by the Marines. Despite all the fighting that day, the embassy received only stray rounds and bits of shrapnel. The rebels did not target the embassy.³¹⁰

At the M'Poko Airfield, the evacuation control center processed arriving Americans flown in from remote sites by French military aircraft. The compound became a beehive of activity as French military and commercial aircraft transported French evacuees, while Mirage jets and Puma helicopters took off for missions above the city. The Marines at the airfield heard small arms fire during the day and watched tracer fire at night in the city.³¹¹ The Marines at the embassy improved their positions throughout the next two days, stringing concertina wire while protests and fire-fights continued nearby. Hundreds of civilians looted the MoCaf Brewery, located just down the

street from the chancery, but were dispersed by the presidential guards. At the airfield, the evacuation control center processed 160 evacuees while French vehicles carried supplies from the airport to the embassy.³¹²

Planning for Reinforcements

Colonel Forbush expressed considerable concern over the 22d MEU's ability to reinforce the Marine security and liaison team. At the joint task force headquarters at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, the situation was being monitored and contingency plans were developed for a large-scale reinforcement. Major Robison requested additional assistance from Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Dick, the joint task force operations officer. Based on the seemingly deteriorating security situation, Marine planners considered flying in 13 light armored vehicles and 10 high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (humvees) using a Lockheed C-5A Galaxy aircraft. Elements of the 22d MEU conducting Operation Matador, a combined training exercise in Spain, could provide this force. After assessing the requirements, European Command decided if a larger force were needed in the Central African Republic, Special Operations Command, Europe, not the 22d MEU, would provide the bulk of the forces. 22d MEU assets designated in the final concept of operations for the reinforcement of Bangui were limited to 27 Marines and two humvees.³¹³

European Command issued a third modification to the execute order on 25 May, directing reinforcement by designated Marines, who began arriving in Bangui that day. The remaining elements arrived by KC-130 at 1700 on 26 May. Additional Marines augmented the evacuation control center at the airfield, moved to the embassy by convoy, and joined the French operational assistance element at its headquarters at Camp Bealle. A total of 61 Marines now provided security and evacuation support.³¹⁴ Two KC-130 flights evacuated 122 people on 25 May. On 26, 27, and 28 May, the daily number of evacuees taken out by KC-130 flights from M'Poko Airfield ranged from 184 to 190. The French maintained assistance with helicopters and armored vehicles, transporting 12 additional Americans from outlying areas to the airfield. With French Legionnaires providing ground security, a French Transall C-160 transport aircraft rescued the remaining Peace

* The embassy had the annual State Department report showing how many Americans were currently residing in its jurisdiction, but the report did not provide locations or contact information on individuals.



Photo courtesy of Maj David A. Krebs

A Marine KC-130 departs Bangui for Yaounde, Cameroon. More than 400 American citizens and foreign nationals were evacuated during Marine Refueler Transport Squadron 252's stay in the Central African Republic.

Corps volunteers and delivered them to the evacuation control center at M'Poko Airfield.

Negotiations between the rebels and the government allowed the rebels to return to their camps under French military escort and President Patasse agreed to pass a law granting them amnesty. On 27 May, the French liaison officer, Captain Paquasse, informed the Marine commander, Major Robison, that the majority of the rebels had returned to their base at Camp Du Kassai.³¹⁵ On the evening of 28 May, the last American citizens requesting evacuation were flown to Cameroon. The total number of evacuees processed by the Marines included 190 Americans and 258 foreign nationals. More than 43 people died and 248 received wounds during the mutiny. Although looting in the city continued, French patrols dispersed most of the remaining looters while negotiations between the government and rebel leaders took place.³¹⁶

Reduction of Presence and Withdrawal

On 30 May, Colonel Forbush received verbal approval to begin a draw down from the Central African Republic. The Joint Task Force Assured Response staff on board the *Guam* initiated plans to conduct this evolution in phases. The next day, 30 Marines and one vehicle left Bangui, and seven additional Marines departed on 1 June. On 13 June, Captain Luehrs assumed command from Major Robison and 11 more Marines departed,

which left 13 at the embassy. Bangui had suffered considerable damage during the mutiny with many businesses looted or burned. The population, however, returned to their normal routines and the security situation relaxed with no threat to either the embassy or Americans.³¹⁷ On 27 June, First Lieutenant John Himes and 11 Marines and sailors from the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) arrived to assume security duties from the 22d MEU. The KC-130 that brought in their relief flew Captain Luehrs and his detachment to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they boarded helicopters for a flight to the *Guam*. The Marines of 22d MEU evacuated 448 citizens from 21 countries in eight days from a location 2,200 miles from their nearest support. Their professionalism, and that of the KC-130 aircrews working with them, made this achievement possible.³¹⁸ As one Peace Corps worker enthusiastically stated: "The Marines were great!" First Sergeant Slater, in charge of the evacuation control center at M'Poko Airfield, likewise praised the French for their cooperation. Bangui remained essentially peaceful while the squad of Marines from the Special Purpose MAGTF guarded the embassy. The Marines settled into a guard post routine and received periodic resupply by KC-130. On 1 August, the last KC-130 flight landed in Bangui and picked up the waiting Marines. Operation Quick Response ended when they rejoined the Special Purpose MAGTF on board the USS *Ponce* (LPD 15).

Chapter 7

Planning, Deployment, and Action

Special Purpose MAGTF Deploys

During April and May, Generals George A. Joulwan and John M. Shalikashvili discussed the replacement of the 22d MEU. As early as 15 April, Marine Forces, Atlantic, staff met to discuss the alternatives. One of the options called for a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) and a two-ship amphibious ready group. Any force deployed by ship would come from 2d Marine Division's designated amphibious ready force, which at that time was the 8th Marines, commanded by Colonel Tony L. Corwin.*

By 18 April, II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) identified the 8th Marines regimental staff as the command element for any special purpose task force. From mid-April through May operational planners at II MEF and subordinate commands considered what forces the mission would require. During the planning, the 8th Marines' staff and subordinate units were heavily involved in Exercise Purple Star, a combined joint task force training exercise at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The units forming the combat service support element that were not involved in Purple Star began planning in mid-April.³¹⁹ When the exercise ended in late May, the commander of Marine Forces, Atlantic, designated the 8th Marines staff as the Special Purpose MAGTF headquarters for planning purposes. Working up plans for two options, the 8th Marines' staff assumed that one large-deck amphibious ship or one small-deck amphibious ship would be available. By the end of May, Naval Surface Forces, Atlantic, made it clear the only available ship was a small-deck amphibious ship, specifically, a landing platform

dock (LPD).³²⁰ The U.S. Atlantic Command issued a planning directive on 28 May and Major General Michael D. Ryan, the commanding general of II MEF, followed up with an alert order to the 8th Marines on 31 May. Following additional guidance from the commanding general, the 8th Marines regimental staff and subordinate units that would form the special purpose task force launched into mission planning analysis efforts.³²¹

Planners first looked at the task force flagship, the USS *Ponce* (LPD 15), commanded by Captain Leon F. Mahoney. The small-deck ship was not configured to function as a flagship and lacked the appropriate communications assets to control a joint task force. The designated task force commander, Colonel Corwin, requested quadruple satellite communication terminals and two deck-mounted tactical satellite radios to enhance command and control communications and intelligence support for the joint task force. Even with these add-ons, the lack of command configuration ultimately resulted in a less than optimum command and control communications capability.^{322**} Further, Marine planners learned the ship was poorly equipped for the control of aircraft in bad weather and could not assist aircraft in performing precision instrument approaches. The LPD's lack of weather radar forced the Marines to rely on satellite photos for weather forecasting. The lack of an embarked navy tactical air control squadron likewise required much more detailed aircraft control coordination. Adding to the challenge was the small size of the *Ponce's* flight deck

* The 2d Marine Division rotated the amphibious ready force, air contingency force, and maritime preposition force contingency duties between the three infantry regiments every eight months.

** The Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force requested the Commander Navy Surface Fleet, Atlantic, install four Magnavox MX 2400 Inmarsats—international maritime satellite communication network systems. The Marines used two AN/PSC-3 man-packed satellite communication terminals. The dial-in data rates were generally limited to between 2.4K and 4.8K and often could not be established at all during daylight hours. (S-6, SPMAGTF "Article Input," undated [Assured Response Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.]

and hangar, which limited the number of helicopters on board as well as the amount of maintenance space. Because of the ship's insufficient aviation maintenance facilities, the task force staff, in coordination with the air combat element, planned to embark three maintenance vans. Unfortunately, the vans further limited space and the squadron could realistically launch only one aircraft at a time.³²³

The planners considered two helicopter options—using either CH-53s or CH-46s. The 8th Marines staff thought the CH-53E best fit the aviation needs of the task force on the LPD. Because of their longer range and availability under guidance from II MEF, the task force joined two CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 (HMH-461) and two Bell UH-1N Huey helicopters from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (HMLA-167).³²⁴

The task force did not have the luxury of a long work up. The regimental staff formed a command element that more than doubled its size. What also differed from the 22d MEU was the addition of 26 Marines from II MEF headquarters assigned specifically to assist the joint task force commander. The regimental staff had little experience working at a joint level and less time to train with the new augmentation. Responsibilities of the regimental staff also grew as the personnel

officer, in a period of three weeks, joined all of the task force Marines and sailors.

Joining the special purpose task force was Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3d Battalion, 8th Marines (-), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Paul E. Lefebvre. The BLT consisted of two rifle companies rather than three, the normal number of rifle companies, as well as augmenting reinforcements. Approximately 100 Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lance R. McBride, formed Combat Service Support Detachment 28 (CSSD 28).³²⁵

By 7 June, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a warning order for a Special Purpose MAGTF to replace the 22d MEU in Liberia and assume responsibilities as the joint task force headquarters. Tasked by European Command, the special purpose task force mission focused on providing the necessary protection and sustainability of personnel at the embassy. The order directed the task force to stay on station until the ordered departure of official American citizens or until the reinforcement of the Marine security guard detachment was no longer required. With approximately 60 days of logistics support plus a heavy reliance on limited aviation assets, Colonel Corwin assumed the threat level would remain unchanged or decrease. He also assumed the





DVIC DM-SD-98-02794

CWO Michael Dominguez instructs Marines of Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, in the use of the M16A2 service rifle from the sling arms position on the flight deck of the USS Ponce (LPD 15) during its transatlantic voyage.

embassy desired to return to pre-crisis operations as soon as possible.³²⁶

On 12 June, the *Ponce* embarked the Marines at Morehead City, North Carolina. At the last minute, the two CH-53E helicopters were replaced with six CH-46 helicopters due to a worldwide grounding of all CH-53E helicopters. With only 66 hours of preparation, 105 Marines from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-264) replaced the HMH-461 detachment.³²⁷

On 14 June, the *Ponce* departed with the Special Purpose MAGTF composed of approximately 732 Marines and sailors, five light armored vehicles, and nine amphibious assault vehicles. During the trip, Marines of the BLT watched detailed videotapes of the embassy's positions and rehearsed for the coming mission. The ship itself was crowded and living and workspaces were cramped. The Marines endured long lines for chow and just about any other services the ship offered.³²⁸

For long-haul aviation support, the task force employed Detachment A, Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252 (VMGR-252). The detachment,

already in theater, was to provide critical KC-130 logistical support, conducting operations from Rota, Dakar, Bangui, and the forward logistics site in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Members of the squadron remained in Rota, Spain, to help move supplies and parts. One replacement aircraft joined the detachment on 13 June, picking up the task force's advance party at Marines Corp Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina.³²⁹

On 15 June, the advance party of the special purpose task force flew to Freetown, Sierra Leone, by Marine KC-130. The advance party transferred to the USS *Guam* (LPH 9) by helicopter for briefings and then continued on to the embassy. Composed of 32 Marines, the party was led by the MEU's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Gunther, and included Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre and the commanding officer of Company L, Captain Jeffrey E. Lister. The group concentrated its efforts on becoming familiar with the operating climate at the embassy and the responsibilities of the joint task force. With the city relatively calm, the advance party, dressed in civilian clothes and transported in



DVIC DM-SD-98-02801

Col Tony L. Corwin, commanding officer of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Liberia, addresses his Marines two days prior to landing in Liberia.

embassy vehicles, reconnoitered the area and visited the headquarters of the West African peacekeepers. Lieutenant Colonel Gunther recalled his impressions of the city, stating that fighters had “looted, burned, or pillaged almost every building we saw.” Viewing the peacekeepers while conducting a reconnaissance of the city, Gunther noted the peacekeepers’ checkpoint or roadblocks consisted of any junk they could place in the road. He further observed West African soldiers shaking down Liberians at the checkpoints and extracting a “road tax,” as West African soldiers were not routinely paid.³³⁰

The Special Purpose MAGTF as the Assured Response Joint Task Force

Colonel Corwin spoke with the Marines on board the *Ponce* on 25 June, and reminded them that he did not know when the mission would end and that it could go on anywhere from two to six months.³³¹ A European Command order arrived that day directing the special purpose task force to relieve the 22d MEU and assume the MEU’s mission.³³²

Arriving off the coast of Sierra Leone the next day, the special purpose task force sent detachments to Rota, Spain; Dakar, Senegal; and Freetown, Sierra Leone, to support the movement of logistics for the joint task force. The detachment sent to Lungi Airfield, near Freetown, came from CSSD 28, and provided security at the forward support base for cargo waiting to be picked up. As the *Ponce* steamed toward Mamba Station off the coast of Liberia, a helicopter from the 22d MEU also picked up Lieutenants David M. Fallon, Seth I. Lapine, Johnny J. Cooper, II, and James A. Tenaglia of Company L, Farrell J. Sullivan, the BLT’s heavy machine gun platoon commander, and Robert S. Peterson, the BLT’s surveillance and target acquisition platoon commander, and delivered them to the embassy to prepare for the turnover.³³³

At sunrise on 27 April, Marines of the special purpose task force came ashore on board the 22d MEU helicopters. Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, led by the executive officer, First Lieutenant Charles N. Black, landed at the embassy’s Landing Zone Bravo and relieved Captain Eric M. Mellinger’s Company F, BLT 2/2. The Marines of Company L conducted a thorough

post and ammunition turnover as they had come ashore with no ammunition. The special purpose task force commander, in coordination with the 22d MEU commander, placed the same size force ashore to minimize any appearance of change. At 1400, Colonel Corwin assumed command of Joint Task Force Assured Response. The new joint task force arrived at the start of the monsoon season and would enjoy only three days of sunny weather the entire time ashore.³³⁴

Similar to the 22d MEU, the special purpose task force's mission called for the Marines to provide protection for embassy personnel and support the logistical needs of the embassy. Organized to accomplish several contingency missions, the assigned tasks included the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel, hydrographic surveys, and noncombatant evacuation operations. The operation order noted the Marines would remain until all official Americans departed or until a security detachment was no longer required.³³⁵

From the inception of the special purpose task force, a phased draw down, envisioned by the

Commander in Chief, European Command, constituted a major factor in Marine planning. Colonel Corwin and Ambassador William Milam worked together on developing a series of conditions to define when the Marines would end their security mission. They listed eight conditions that helped define the criteria for withdrawal of the Marines for European Command.³³⁶

Ashore, the Marines operated the main joint operations center from the embassy. This was different from the 22d MEU, which operated a forward joint operations center there while keeping its main joint operations center on board ship. Since space was at a premium on the *Ponce*, placing the main joint operations center ashore made sense.³³⁷ The commander of the reinforced rifle company ashore, Captain Jeffrey E. Lister, directed his Company L Marines to enhance their defensive positions. Captain Lister, a veteran of Sharp Edge, had a variety of non-lethal weapons available if needed. These included beanbag shotgun rounds, pepper spray, stinger grenades, and tear gas. The company also had its normal complement of ammunition and weapons. Later,



DVIC DM-SD-98-02804

Marines of the special purpose task force arrive at the American Embassy by CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters. The Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Marines assumed the embassy security mission from the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit.



DVIC DM-ST-02-00484

Marine rooftop defensive positions dot the south side of the Ambassador's residence at the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.

when Captain Eric L. Geissler's Company K rotated into the compound, the detachment from Company C, 2d Combat Engineers, put up chicken wire and black screening to mask the positions of Marines manning the compound.* The rifle companies rotated out every six to nine days in the humid, rainy weather.³³⁸

The only armed troops the Marines saw were the West African peacekeepers. Periodically, peacekeeper vehicles and foot patrols traveled in front of the embassy. In more than a few instances, the peacekeepers pointed weapons at the Marines. Familiar with the rules of engagement, Marines dealt with these incidents by first reacting defensively and then directing the soldiers to point their weapons away from the embassy. Several false alarms occurred each night during the first week, which kept the sentries on alert. Unarmed factional fighters gathered occasionally within sight of the embassy at the house of Charles Taylor's mother, but they never appeared with weapons. The Marines observed

numerous persons missing limbs pass by the embassy, a visual reminder of the human cost of the fighting.³³⁹

Company K replaced Company L on 4 July and both units enjoyed a 4th of July celebration. Around noon, in the middle of the company's turnover, some 80 to 100 Liberians arrived in front of Gate One. The crowd demonstrated their support for the Americans for about an hour and then departed. That afternoon the Ambassador gave a speech in which he thanked the Marines and stressed his hope for a return to normalcy. To celebrate the occasion, the Ambassador, the Marines of the joint task force, and the Marine security guard detachment held a ceremony and cookout at the Marine House.³⁴⁰

Marines Draw Down and Depart

On 9 July, Lieutenant Colonel Gunther flew to European Command headquarters and briefed the command's staff on the task force draw down options.³⁴¹ He recommended 15 August as the departure date to Marine Brigadier General David M. Mize, the deputy joint operations officer for

* The concern for extra force protection measures came in the wake of the bombing of the U.S. Air Force's Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on 25 June 1996.

European Command. General Mize asked if the joint task force could withdraw sooner. After a number of discussions and assessments at different levels, European Command agreed that all forces could withdraw by 3 August. The plan acted as a catalyst for a decision by the national command authority to begin a phased withdrawal.³⁴²

On 10 July, the Marines and sailors on the *Ponce* celebrated the ship's 25th birthday while planning for the accelerated withdrawal began.³⁴³ By 15 July, with the plan approved, a phased draw down began with one third of the force ashore moving to the ship. The battalion landing team reduced the number of Marines manning Posts Four, Six, and Eight Alpha. Assets focused on intelligence collection remained ashore at full strength until the end, but CSSD 28 started taking down positions as the infantry company no longer manned them.³⁴⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre, BLT 3/8 commanding officer, stated: "The methodology, if you will, for the draw down was to: First, reduce posts that were redundant; second, reduce those with the least risk and to

offset those [closed posts] with increased patrolling." The landing team initially kept crew-served weapons in place and reduced the manning of posts by ones and twos. The Marines incrementally closed the non-essential posts, but the posts that were absolutely essential remained manned until the final withdrawal.³⁴⁵

Monrovia remained calm. As Marine forces withdrew, the West African peacekeeping force grew with the arrival of 1,500 Nigerian reinforcements.³⁴⁶ The larger force increased its activity and became more visible on the streets.³⁴⁷ Regular commercial flights at the Spriggs-Payne Airport resumed by mid-month and the embassy's logistical needs were met through commercial channels. A reflection of the return to normalcy was the gradual reduction of the number of refugees in July at the embassy's near-by Greystone compound. By 19 July, the security situation was back to normal, with Monrovia completely secured by the West African force.³⁴⁸ On 23 July, in an effort to reinforce the peace and head off any further fighting, the Economic Community of West African States met in Accra, Ghana, to discuss the



DVIC DM-SD-98-02807

A Marine stands guard at Post Two. The only other armed troops the Marines observed were West African peacekeepers.



DVIC DM-SD-98-02810

Local Liberians dance in the street outside the American Embassy during a peaceful demonstration on the 4th of July. They hold signs asking for American assistance and wishing the United States a happy Independence Day.

Liberia situation. The summit resolved to implement fully the Abuja Accords and impose sanctions against the heads of the factions if the truce, disarmament, and scheduled elections did not occur.³⁴⁹ Both the visible reinforcements and the talks reaffirmed that Monrovia would remain stable.

On 25 July, 45 personnel from the special purpose task force's advance party departed for the U.S. by Navy C-9 and C-130 flights from Freetown, Sierra Leone. Marines closed Posts Three, Two Alpha, and the .50-caliber positions. The next day, European Command issued the redeployment order for the Special Purpose MAGTF.³⁵⁰

On 1 August, in a message to the State Department recommending the termination of evacuation status for Monrovia, Ambassador Milam stated: "the main faction leaders declared, in Abuja, Nigeria, a nationwide cessation of hostilities and their intentions to disarm their fighters by the end of September. I have recommended that the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force depart on 3 August."³⁵¹

On 2 August, Joint Task Force Assured Response closed down the small liaison detachment in Dakar, Senegal, followed the next day by the closing of the forward logistics site in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Early that morning, before light, Marines of Company L left their remaining defensive positions and gathered near the embassy's landing zone. As the sun rose, they began their departure. The movement of forces from the embassy took a total of six hours. Seven Marines, assigned as security guards, were left behind.³⁵²

After departing Mamba Station, the task force steamed to the Canary Islands for some well-deserved liberty before heading home. The special purpose task force, formed for a contingency, moved more than 620,000 pounds of cargo and 2,400 passengers in 300 sorties during the monsoon season. More importantly, it accomplished the goal of providing security for the embassy, which allowed the State Department to continue working for a peaceful solution to the long and bloody Liberian civil war.

Epilogue

A Stabilizing Presence

“Throughout all of West Africa you can wake up on any given morning and find one or more of the governments overthrown,” noted Lieutenant Colonel Barry M. Ford following the 1997 noncombatant evacuation in Sierra Leone. “The entire continent is really in desperate trouble. Over the next few years we’re going to be spending a lot of time in Africa.”

The comments of Lieutenant Colonel Ford, a Headquarters Marine Corps analyst specializing in Africa and the Middle East, would prove to be prophetic.³⁵³ Marines would be deployed to Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Congo in 1998, Mozambique in 2000, and again to Liberia in 2003.

In 1996, while attempts were being made to find a peaceful solution to the Liberian civil war, factional fighting in Rwanda and the successful gains by Tutsi forces prompted many Hutus to flee in mass to neighboring Republic of Zaire. This exodus resulted in the establishment of a number of large refugee camps in eastern Zaire, creating areas of instability and tensions. In October, Rwandan troops entered Zaire to halt Hutu incursions. At about the same time, an armed Tutsi coalition, led by Laurent-Desire Kabila and known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), was formed when local officials in Zaire attempted to expel them at the behest of Hutu groups. With the goal of forcibly ousting Zaire’s President Mobutu Sese Seko, the ADFL, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, began a military campaign to capture the capital, Kinshasa.

As conditions in Zaire deteriorated, the United States prepared for the possible evacuation of about 500 American citizens, 320 of whom were in Kinshasa along with an estimated 7,000 Europeans. In response, a three-part plan was

launched. A 350-member U.S. Army enabling force from U.S. European Command was deployed to Brazzaville, Congo, across the river from Kinshasa, and Libreville, Gabon. In addition, a small group of communicators was sent to Zaire to establish a communications facility in the capital, and a 325-man permissive force, complete with helicopters and transport aircraft based in Libreville and Brazzaville, prepared to evacuate people if necessary. The third leg of the tripartite plan was the deployment of an amphibious assault ship with a scaled down Marine expeditionary unit, or “mini-MEU.”³⁵⁴

In November, the amphibious assault ship *Nassau* (LHA 4), the amphibious transport dock *Nashville* (LPD 13), and the dock landing ship *Pensacola* (LSD 38), with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)) on board, departed the East Coast on Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 97-1 deployment. In March 1997, Colonel Emerson N. Gardner, Jr.’s Marine unit took part in Operation Silver Wake, the noncombatant evacuation of Albania. While stationed off Albania, the *Nassau*, with elements of the MEU, was dispatched more than 5,100 nautical miles from the Adriatic Sea to the eastern Atlantic Ocean near the Congo, just north of Zaire, and ordered to prepare for the possible evacuation of American citizens should the civil war spread to the capital. The remainder of the 26th MEU (SOC) on board the *Nashville* and *Pensacola* stayed behind in the Mediterranean to provide strategic reserve for the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia. Prior to leaving the Adriatic, a detachment of the MEU’s CH-46 and UH-1 helicopters was exchanged for AH-1W Super Cobras from the other ships and ANGLICO, the unit’s air, naval gunfire support team.



DoD (USAF) 970403-F-7910D-502

Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) prepare to move out after arriving in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Command and support elements were deployed as part of contingency planning for a possible evacuation of American citizens and others from Zaire.

On 5 April 1997, the 26th MEU assumed the main effort for the planned noncombatant evacuation from the Joint Special Operations Task Force, in Brazzaville, allowing the number of U.S. Army forces on the ground to be cut. "Our concept is to maintain a light footprint at the MEU forward headquarters...in Brazzaville," Colonel Gardner explained. "We're going to keep the bulk of our Marines aboard USS *Nassau* poised and ready to respond to orders."³⁵⁵ The *Nassau* remained on station for approximately one month while the Marines ashore conducted several rehearsal evacuation drills, waiting to be called to rescue Americans in Zaire in case that country's civil war spilled into Kinshasa. As the *Nassau* stood sentinel duty off Zaire, the amphibious assault ship *Kearsarge* (LHD 3), with elements of Colonel Samuel T. Helland's 22d MEU (SOC) on board, departed Norfolk, Virginia, on 15 April, two weeks ahead of schedule, and headed for the west coast of Africa to relieve the *Nassau* on 2 May, ensuring the *Nassau* got home within her scheduled rotation date. The other two ships of

the *Kearsarge's* amphibious ready group—the amphibious transport dock *Ponce* (LPD 15) and the dock landing ship *Carter Hall* (LSD 50)—remained behind and later deployed to the Mediterranean with the rest of 22d MEU's Marines for exercises in Spain.³⁵⁶

Colonel Helland forward-based 123 Marines, 2 CH-53 Sea Stallions, 2 CH-46 Sea Knights, and 2 AH-1W Super Cobras more than 350 miles inland at an airfield near Brazzaville, across the Congo River from Kinshasa. Back-up forces, if needed, remained on board the *Kearsarge*.³⁵⁷ Following failed peace talks between Kabila and Mobutu in early May, Mobutu left the country and Kabila's forces peacefully marched into Kinshasa on the 17th. Kabila declared himself president, consolidated power around himself and the ADFL, and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Marines had evacuated no one.

On 25 May, soldiers led by Major Johnny Paul Koromah of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council seized power in Sierra Leone. Koromah formed a new military government consisting of

both soldiers loyal to him and Revolutionary United Front rebels who had fought the ruling governments for the past five years. The coup ousted President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, a 20-year United Nations diplomat and the first democratically elected government, after only one year in office and after five years of civil war that left more than 10,000 dead and forced an estimated million to flee.

A former British colony about the size of South Carolina sandwiched between Guinea and Liberia, Sierra Leone boasted beautiful beaches and bountiful resources. But after decades of civil strife, the country's infrastructure remained poorly developed and the gap between the few wealthy elite and the rest of the country's population had grown immense.

Chaos reigned following the coup. Work stopped, stores closed, and looters ruled the streets of the Freetown, pillaging homes and businesses. The situation in the capital had deteriorated to near anarchy. "It has become a very dangerous place with a bunch of 13-year-olds running around and out of control," the American charge d'affaires reported. "These are a bunch of thugs and lunatics having a free reign of terror with the army joining in."³⁵⁸ At the request of the Department of State, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen directed U.S. European Command to prepare for yet another noncombatant evacuation operation. Ironically, Sierra Leone had been used the year before as a safe haven for evacuees fleeing neighboring Liberia.

In standby status off the coast of the Congo, the 22d MEU (SOC) was selected to spearhead the effort, codenamed Noble Obelisk. Within hours of being alerted, Marines were rushed back on board the *Kearsarge* from the base camp in Brazzaville, Congo, and the ship sailed north at full speed on 25 May. Four days later, the *Kearsarge* was 20 miles off the coast of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Once the deputy chief of mission in Freetown gave the word to begin the evacuation, the plan called for a Marine security force to land, assess the situation, and then begin processing and loading evacuees on helicopters for the flight to the ship. After a few days, the evacuees would be taken to Conakry, Guinea, for transportation arranged by the State Department to their final destination.³⁵⁹

Before dawn on the 30th, a company of Marines from the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, boarded CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters for the flight to Freetown despite a coup-imposed flight ban.



DoD (USAF) 970409-F-7910D-503

Marine Cpl Joseph Calebro uses an AN/PSC-3 satellite communications radio to establish a link from the tarmac at Point Noire, Republic of Congo. Cpl Calebro was attached to Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 to provide KC-130 Hercules aircraft with secure communications.

Backed by heavy weapons, fast attack vehicles, AH-1W Super Cobra gunships, and AV-8B Harrier attack jets, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Greenwood's Marines established an evacuation site near the Mammy Yoko Hotel where hundreds of evacuees had gathered. From a control center established inside the hotel, members of MEU Service Support Group 22 began processing the waiting evacuees. The frightened men, women, and about 200 children then streamed on board Marine helicopters as fast as the aircraft could move in and out of the landing zone. Ten hours and 85 sorties later, more than 900 evacuees had been moved to the *Kearsarge*. Once on board ship, the evacuees underwent further processing and screening and were provided food, clothing, medical treatment, and entertainment. The fol-



DoD (USN) 970530-N-8506C-002

Evacuees from Freetown, Sierra Leone, are directed from a Marine CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter across the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge (LHD 3). On 30 May, more than 900 persons from 40 countries were evacuated.

lowing day, pilots and crewmen of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261 transported the evacuees to the designated safe haven up the coast in neighboring Guinea.³⁶⁰

While Marines were busy evacuating Americans and other foreign nationals, U.S. Army Special Forces rescued two other Marines, members of the security guard tasked with closing the embassy and safeguarding classified documents, who had become trapped in the chancellery. Passing unopposed through several rebel checkpoints, the small team of soldiers got the Marines out without incident.

Two days after the first evacuation, Marines again boarded helicopters following reports of further unrest in the city. Working from the same landing zone near the Mammy Yoko Hotel, Marines encountered no hostile gunfire while evacuating more than 400 Americans and third-country nationals in less than five hours. Following the routine established during the first evacuation, the second wave of evacuees were screened, processed, and quickly transferred to Conakry, Guinea. Among them were 18 orphans

and Pinkie McCann-Willis, who headed the Freetown office of the Indianapolis, Indiana-based Americans for African Adoption agency. McCann-Willis said she and the children had spent two days pinned down by gunfire before she was able to pile the children into the back of her pickup truck and make a dash for the Mammy Yoko Hotel.

Fighting and chaos again increased ashore, this time exacerbated by Nigerian warships (whose government opposed the coup) that were bombarding positions held by Koromah's forces. A third and final evacuation was planned, but Koromah's forces were now targeting the beachfront Mammy Yoko Hotel where a contingent of Nigerian soldiers that had deployed ashore had set up their command post. With the Mammy Yoko Hotel untenable for the evacuees, the evacuation site was moved to the Cape Sierra Hotel-Restaurant, less than two miles south along the beach. The MEU still planned to use helicopters to transport a majority of the evacuees.

Prepared for possible heavy fighting, Lieutenant Colonel Greenwood's Marines came

ashore at first light on 3 June with heavy weapons, including six light armored vehicles equipped with 25mm and 7.62mm machine guns. The weapons were not needed, and more than 1,200 persons, including 10 carried out on stretchers, were evacuated in five hours in the absence of any resistance. On board the *Kearsarge*, the ship's medical facilities were swamped with casualties and individuals traumatized by the past days' events. Despite the operational tempo of the evacuation, Marine and Navy helicopters began transferring individuals to Conakry the same day.³⁶¹ In three safe, fast, and efficient waves, the Navy-Marine Corps team had rescued more than 2,500 persons.

While Marines of the 22d MEU (SOC) completed their evacuation efforts in Sierra Leone and prepared to sail to the Canary Islands for a well-deserved liberty call, Brazzaville, Congo, was plunged into chaos when government troops were sent in to disarm the private militia of a rival

party. Dozens of Americans were held up at the U.S. Embassy and other pockets throughout the city. Although the 22d MEU was put on standby, European Command officials instead decided to rely on the French to evacuate the bulk of American citizens and sent a 12-man U.S. Army Special Forces team to the embassy to provide security and extra communications.

The *Kearsarge* continued on to the Canary Islands and later to the Mediterranean where she linked up with the other two ships of the amphibious ready group. In Sierra Leone, Nigerian-led Economic Community Ceasefire Monitoring Group forces ousted the Koromah government after 10 months in office, and the democratically elected government of President Kabbach was reinstated in March 1998.

Following the close down of Joint Task Force Assured Response and the departure of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force in August 1996, the United States, the United



DoD (USN) 970530-N-8506C-001

A child clings to a crewman on the flight deck of the USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) after a frightening first ride in a helicopter. She was among the first evacuees to arrive on board the Norfolk, Virginia-based amphibious assault ship.

Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) embarked on negotiations to disarm and demobilize the warring factions in Liberia. After considerable progress, special elections were held in July 1997 with Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party emerging victorious, primarily due to the fear of a return to war had Taylor lost. For the next six years, the Taylor government made little investment in the country's infrastructure. Nor did it attempt to improve the lives of Liberians. Instead, Taylor supported the rebel factions in neighboring states and fomented unrest and brutal excesses in the region, which led Taylor's former adversaries to resume their armed rebellion.

On 4 June 2003 in Accra, Ghana, the ECOWAS facilitated the beginning of peace talks between the Government of Liberia and rebel groups—the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).³⁶² LURD, the larger of the rebel groups, was based in neighboring Guinea and claimed 3,000 to 4,000 troops, while Cote d'Ivoire-based MODEL, also known as Lima Force, claimed 800 to 1,000. They largely represented elements of the former ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J factions that had fought Taylor during Liberia's civil war. That same day, the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone issued a press statement announcing the opening of a sealed indictment accusing Taylor of "bearing the greatest responsibility" for atrocities in Sierra Leone since November 1996.

As the intense fighting in the western suburbs threatened to spread into Monrovia, the only part of the West African nation Taylor controlled, the international staffs of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations were forced to evacuate the capital. On 7 June, French helicopters swooped in to rescue more than 500 fleeing Americans, Europeans, and other foreign nationals from the American and European Union compounds. The evacuees were transported to a French warship offshore and then to Abidjan, Ivory Coast. American Ambassador John W. Blaney stayed behind with a heavy security presence.³⁶³

With the violence escalating, Ambassador Blaney requested military aid should additional embassy personnel and American citizens have to be evacuated. At the direction of the Secretary of Defense, the European Command sent a small military support team to augment the security



Photo courtesy of the authors
Liberian President Charles Ghakay Taylor, known as "Pappy" to his supporters, was accused of masterminding regional conflicts while the plight of his country's 3.3 million people worsened.

forces at the embassy in Monrovia, support State Department personnel with the orderly departure of United States citizens wishing to leave the country, and to be pre-positioned to aid in any evacuation. The deployment was given the name *Shining Express*. The *Kearsarge*, then returning home with elements of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade after combat service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and providing support to President George W. Bush during his summits with Arab leaders in Egypt and Jordan, was directed down the west coast of Africa to provide security and lift support for the operation. The increased American presence was enough to influence the Taylor government and two rebel groups to agree to a ceasefire on 17 June that envisioned a comprehensive peace agreement within 30 days. With stability somewhat reestablished, the State Department decided that an evacuation and the *Kearsarge's* presence were no longer necessary, and on 19 June she turned her bow to the west and set out for a 28 June return to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The three Liberian factions repeatedly broke the ceasefire, resulting in the resumption of bitter fighting and increasing pressure on the United States to take a more active role in the Liberia conflict. On 30 June, at the request of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, the

Security Council met to discuss the possible deployment of a multinational force to Liberia. Secretary Annan raised the prospect of American involvement, which later was echoed by West African mediators. The Bush administration was reported to be weighing its options, among them the deployment of 2,000 troops. "We're exploring all options as to how to keep the situation peaceful and stable," President Bush said. "One thing has to happen: Taylor needs to leave the country. In order for there to be peace and stability in Liberia, Charles Taylor needs to leave now."³⁶⁴

While the United States determined what form its assistance would take, the West African States took action. Meeting in Accra, Ghana, ECOWAS military chiefs pledged on 4 July to raise 3,000 troops from member countries for an intervention force to restore peace in Liberia. But the ability of West African countries to send enough troops was plagued by financial and logistical constraints, said Ghana's Lieutenant-General Seth Obeng, chairman of the economic community's Defense and Security Commission. "ECOWAS and the

African Union should intensify their initiatives to get an advanced country, possibly the United States, to spearhead peace efforts in Liberia, just as Britain and France did for Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire," he suggested. The recommendations of the commission were forwarded to the community's Mediation and Security Council for ratification.³⁶⁵

Bowing to American demands, President Taylor said on 4 July he would step down from power, but only after a U.S.-led peacekeeping force arrived in the war-torn country. Demonstrators took to the streets of the capital insisting that Taylor quit immediately. Government soldiers opened fire on the group of more than 500 protestors, wounding one. But the group continued their march on the U.S. Embassy, chanting 'Taylor kingdom must come down. Satan Taylor must go.' Two days later, Taylor agreed to leave the country and take up asylum in Nigeria, but only after an orderly exit from power supported by an international peacekeeping force to "prevent chaos and disruption in Liberia."³⁶⁶



Photo courtesy of the authors

Widespread looting, rape, and lawlessness characterized the campaign carried out by Liberian rebel fighters, many of which were children. Drunk or often under the influence of drugs, they meted out instant retaliation to any civilian who talked back or denied them a favor.



DoD (USAF) 200417125553

Marines with the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team based out of Rota, Spain, prepare to depart Freeport, Sierra Leone, for Monrovia. The team was assigned to provide security for the American Embassy in Liberia.

With the warring factions again honoring a truce, some shops and supermarkets reopened and a United Nations chartered vessel began to evacuate some of the thousands of trapped Sierra Leonean refugees. During the lull in the fighting, a 32-member American humanitarian assistance survey team arrived from Europe at Roberts International Airport, about 12 miles south of the capital, and then flew to the embassy's Mamba Point diplomatic enclave. Composed of medical personnel, civil engineers, logistics specialists, water purification experts, and a public affairs officer, the group was to assess the security environment and determine what type of humanitarian support the United States could offer. Supporting the group were 15 Marines from the Rota, Spain-based Marine Corps Security Force Company, Europe. They were to act as a smaller version of the company's Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST). Initially termed Operation Sheltering Sky, the codename for the United States effort in Liberia would later be changed to Joint Task Force Liberia.

Apart from reviewing the security situation, the assessment team was to visit various refugee camps and meet with ECOWAS officials to discuss American support for the West African peacekeeping force. The team's recommendations would be forwarded to General James L. Jones, commander of U.S. Forces in Europe, who would then relay them through Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to the President. "The decision on a larger deployment of a peacekeeping force will be made by President Bush," said Ambassador Blaney when asked if the arrival of the team marked the beginning of a U.S. peacekeeping operation in Liberia.³⁶⁷

The Liberian capital braced for a fresh attack by the LURD rebel group in mid-July. Troops loyal to President Taylor reported that rebel forces were massing near the strategic town of Key Junction, 23 miles northwest of Monrovia. The fragile ceasefire agreed to on 17 June was in danger of breaking down again due to the standoff between Taylor, who refused to step down and go into exile until international peacekeepers

arrived, and LURD, which threatened to attack any peacekeepers who landed in Liberia before Taylor left. On 17 July, LURD forces overran Key Junction and moved west, raising fears they could mount a third assault on Monrovia. During the first two assaults in June, several hundred were killed and more than 100,000 were made homeless. MODEL forces also attacked government positions at the port town of Greenville, southeast of the capital, and at Belliewaley to the northeast.

By 19 July, thousands of terrified civilians with their meager belongings headed for the center of Monrovia, fleeing the city's western suburbs as fighting between Liberian government soldiers and LURD rebels escalated around Virginia and Saint Paul Bridge, about 6 miles away. In the Ghanaian capital, where peace talks were being held, the various factions began reviewing a comprehensive peace plan drafted by West African mediators. In addition, ECOWAS began initial moves to deploy the 1,000-man vanguard force of peacekeepers, which would enable President Taylor to go into exile and allow American troops to join the West African economic community in ending Liberia's civil war.

Despite West African community leaders and MODEL calls for LURD forces to halt their assault on Monrovia, the capital city continued to be pounded with mortar fire and fierce street fighting persisted as reinforcements moved to cut off roads to the interior. In a fresh wave of looting, many government fighters took advantage of the anarchy to break into closed shops. Venting their anger and frustration, a group of Liberians dumped mangled and bloodied bodies outside

the gates of the embassy, some saying, "If you had intervened this would not be happening." To defend the embassy in the midst of the fighting, 41 Marines of Yorktown, Virginia-based 2d FAST Company, who were training in Rota, Spain, were flown in on three U.S. Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from 56th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron from Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland. The unit arrived as mortar fire rained on residential areas and struck the commissary and adjacent Graystone compound across from the embassy. The helicopters had been sent to Sierra Leone on 13 July to support the survey team along with a Royal Air Force MC-130P Combat Shadow deployed to Senegal from its base in Mildenhall, England. On their return trip, the helicopters evacuated members of the humanitarian survey team.

In addition to approving the Ambassador's request that his Marine security guard be reinforced, Secretary Rumsfeld also signed an order moving the *Iwo Jima* amphibious ready group and its embarked 26th MEU (SOC) from the Red Sea near Djibouti, where it was supporting Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, into the Mediterranean. Once there, the ready group could reach the coast of Liberia in seven to 10 days if needed.

During the last week of July, the beleaguered government of President Taylor came under attack on a second front as rebels battling to capture the capital launched a simultaneous attack on the port city of Buchanan, 75 miles to the southeast. Meanwhile, rebel forces advanced their positions within Monrovia, gaining access to Somalia Drive, the ring road encircling the northern out-



DoD (USAF) 200417104632

Marines with the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team provide security for a U.S. Air Force HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter from the 56th Rescue Squadron as it lands at the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.



DoD (USN) 030718-N-8933S-0011

The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and the landing ship dock USS Carter Hall (LSD 50) pause for an underway replenishment to take on supplies while enroute to the west coast of Africa.

skirts of the city. The rebel forces ignored a plea by Ambassador Blaney to cease fire, withdraw from Monrovia, give up their attempts to seize Buchanan, and allow breathing space for the peacekeepers to arrive. It looked to many observers that both rebel movements had now decided to disregard the 17 June agreement and launch an all-out offensive to finish off Taylor's regime before the international force arrived.

With the embassy locked down, Monrovia under siege, and most of the city's million inhabitants now living in squalid conditions on the brink of starvation, the Bush administration, although pressured by military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan and leery of another open-ended mission, ordered the deployment of the *Iwo Jima* amphibious ready group and 26th MEU (SOC) to the west coast of Africa. Within 24 hours, the joint task force's forward coordination element was deployed to the embassy where it served as the task force's liaison to the embassy and provided the staff with early noncombatant and medical evacuation plans. The forward coordination element would remain at the embassy for next 65 days. The administration also offered to pay more than \$10 million toward the cost of deploying West African peacekeepers to Liberia.³⁶⁸ The West African economic community

estimated it would need \$104 million to keep the force in country for six months.

On 2 August, President Taylor announced he would resign as head of state on 11 August and leave the country on an unspecified date. His commitment fell short of the economic community's demand that he step down and leave Liberia within three days of the arrival of Nigerian peacekeeping troops. Taylor's attempt to delay his departure did not impress the United States, which now had 2,300 Marines sitting 31 miles off the coast waiting to intervene if necessary. Commanded by Colonel Andrew P. Frick, the 26th MEU (SOC) comprised the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, with attached artillery and vehicle transport; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264, a composite squadron of helicopters and Harrier jets; and MEU Service Support Group 26. The MEU was divided between the three ships of the amphibious ready group: the amphibious assault ship *Iwo Jima* (LHD 7); the amphibious transport dock *Nashville* (LPD 13); and the amphibious dock landing ship *Carter Hall* (LSD 50). All were veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Two days later, the first contingent of Nigerian troops arrived in a heavy rain at Roberts International Airport on board two white United Nations helicopters from neighboring Sierra

Leone. The mission of the 60-man vanguard was to secure the airport for the eventual deployment of more than 3,200 troops, made up of contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Benin, and Gambia. Once on the ground, the Nigerian peacekeepers, whose strength would quickly grow to two battalions, moved cautiously toward the capital where an informal truce between government and rebel troops was in effect. The same day, the U.S. Army's South European Task Force (Airborne) (SETAF) deployed a 45-member forward headquarters to the *Iwo Jima*. The headquarters, headed by Major General Thomas Turner, the SETAF and Joint Task Force Liberia commander, was composed of a majority of SETAF personnel and was designed to make maximum use of the Army task force's capability to reach back to Southern European task force's main headquarters near Vicenza, Italy. In addition to command and control of the forces operating in Liberia, the forward headquarters coordinated with officials from the embassy, Department of State, United Nations, and humanitarian organizations operating ashore.

On 6 August, the first of 20 Marine contingents authorized to go ashore arrived by helicopter at the embassy where it linked-up with the forward coordination element. The seven-man liaison team was to coordinate the efforts of civilian contractors who were providing humanitarian services and logistical help to the Nigerian troops and to assist in reopening the port and coordinating needed repairs and maintenance to Roberts International Airport. In addition, a casualty evacuation and quick reaction force was established on board ship to support U.S. and multinational personnel ashore.

The following day, the West African peacekeepers formally moved into the city of Monrovia and received a rapturous welcome from thousands of Liberians waving palm branches and white flags and chanting, "We Want Peace! No More War!" But the Nigerian troops were not ready to cross over to the port area on Bushrod Island, which was held by LURD forces. Meanwhile, President Taylor confirmed to the Liberian parliament that he would resign on the 11th and hand over power to Vice President



DoD (USMC) 03814-M-9750-B-502

Peacekeepers control a peaceful yet peace-hungry crowd as they move into the capital. Under the leadership of Nigerian Gen Festus Okonkwo, Nigeria's contribution would swell to more than 1,500 soldiers.



DoD (USN) 030814-N-6204K-028

Marines from 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit wait on the deck of USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) prior to boarding helicopters bound for Monrovia, Liberia.

Moses Blah in view of what he called “a broad-based international conspiracy against my government.”

As he pledged, Charles Taylor ended his six-year rule of Liberia on 11 August by handing over the green presidential sash of office to Vice President Blah and flying into exile in Nigeria. Dressed in his trademark white safari suit, he was somber, but still defiant. “I want to be the sacrificial lamb, I will be the whipping boy,” but, he said, “God willing, I will be back.”³⁶⁹ Blah, a friend and ally of Taylor during the civil war in the 1990s, would rule until October when he would hand over the reigns of power to an interim president chosen by the Liberian peace conference under way in Accra, Ghana. Timed to coincide with the resignation and departure of Taylor, the amphibious ready group appeared over the horizon as fixed and rotary aircraft conducted air patrols in the skies over Monrovia. The show of force not only prevented serious incidents from occurring during the transition of power, but also provided a psychological boost to both the citizens of Monrovia and the West

African peacekeepers on the ground. On 13 August, President Bush informed Congress of his actions as required by the War Powers Resolution, noting, “it is anticipated that U.S. forces will re-deploy when ECOMIL [ECOWAS Mission in Liberia] forces have transitioned to the follow-on U.N. stabilization operations.”³⁷⁰

Shortly after dawn on 14 August, nine CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters carrying 150 combat-equipped Marines of Battery L, 10th Marines, touched down at Roberts International Airport. The Marines would operate as a quick reaction force (QRF) should peacekeepers come under significant attack. “The QRF is not there in a security role,” a Department of Defense spokesman stressed. “They’re merely standing by to provide a reaction capability if something unexpected occurs with regard to an ECOMIL unit, and only to stabilize the tactical situation so [ECOMIL forces] can restart their mission.”³⁷¹ The shipboard QRF remained on 60-minute alert, while the casualty evacuation team remained at 180-minute alert. Another 60 Marines landed in four amphibious assault vehicles in the



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU

A CH-53E Super Stallion with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 drops off supplies to the Marines at Robert International Airport.

port area. Task force representatives, along with Ambassador Blaney, were then able to successfully negotiate the withdrawal of LURD forces from the port.

As helicopters and two Harrier jets flew overhead, Nigerian armored personnel carriers moved across two bridges spanning the Mesurado River onto Bushrod Island and formally secured the strategic port area. As they did, LURD fighters were still in the process of withdrawing their pickup trucks with looted items to the Po River on the northern edge of the city. Under the protection of a Marine security platoon and Nigerian troops, American combat engineers, explosive ordnance disposal personnel, and U.S. Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams began a survey of the heavily looted port to permit much needed humanitarian supplies to be put ashore. The survey also noted



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU

Maj James E. Donnellan (right), executive officer of 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, goes over plans at the international airfield for an immediate action drill with Maj Lojah, the commanding officer of Delta Company, 1st Nigerian Battalion.



Photo courtesy of 26th MEU
1stLt Matthew A. Markham (left), with Battery L, discusses tactics with his Nigerian counterpart during a quick reaction drill at Roberts International Airport.

depths and obstacles for any possible amphibious landing by the Marines afloat.³⁷²

On 18 August, as more peacekeeping forces arrived, two force reconnaissance teams and a headquarters element were inserted into Bushrod Island and Roberts International Airport to act as liaison with the two Nigerian battalions. The teams were tasked with providing communications and coordination between Joint Task Force Liberia and the multinational force. Additional logistics personnel also were put ashore. Later that day, the Liberian government and two rebel movements signed a peace agreement in Accra, Ghana, that paved the way for an interim government headed by an independent civilian to take power in October, thus ending 14 years of near constant civil war. The chairman of the West African regional body, Ghana's President John Kufuor, "reminded the former warring factions that genuine political power comes from the ballot box and democracy rather than from the barrel of the gun."³⁷³ Despite the peace agreement and relative calm in the capital, government and rebel forces continued to clash throughout the interior, which created new waves of refugees.

A week after the signing of the peace accord the 150-member Marine force withdrew from the airport to ships of the amphibious group off shore. The decision "reflects the situation on the ground," said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas N. Collins, the Southern European Task Force spokesman. "We're here to support [the West Africans], but we can do it better from the ship." About 100 Marines remained on the ground, 70 guarding the embassy and 30 acting as liaisons

with West African peacekeepers. "They're forsaking us," said a young Liberian. "We wish they'd stay until peace would come. Their presence here puts fear in our fighters. It makes them think if they carry on hostilities, they'll be handled by the Americans."³⁷⁴

During the next month as additional West African peacekeepers arrived, boosting their numbers to more than 3,000, Marines of the 26th MEU waited off shore conducting daily reconnaissance flights and remaining ready to respond if needed. On 5 September problems arose. Two Marines suffering from low blood pressure, fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and liver and kidney dysfunction were evacuated to Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center in Germany. An additional 15 Marines developing similar symptoms were cross-decked to the *Iwo Jima's* intensive care unit with follow-on evacuation to Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland. Additional cases were evacuated several days later. At Bethesda they were diagnosed with malaria. "We know everybody took their medication," said Captain Gregory Martin, USN, a physician specializing in infectious diseases. "We don't know if somebody missed a dose here or there. Probably so."³⁷⁵ By the end of the month, all the evacuated personnel had been released from the Naval Medical Center and were placed on convalescent leave.

With the West African troops due to become part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in early October, the 26th MEU began the retrograde of its liaison teams. By the end of September, all were on board ship except 55 Marines who would remain in Monrovia to beef up security at the embassy. The *Carter Hall* and *Nashville* left the West African coast on the 28th followed by the *Iwo Jima* three days later. The ships of the amphibious ready group would rendezvous at Rota, Spain, where they would conduct a wash-down and the personnel given some needed liberty before getting underway for the United States.

"When you see the *Iwo Jima*, the *Nashville* and *Carter Hall* off the coastline, it shows that the American public cares and that there is a definite military presence," said Colonel Frick. "We provided a stabilizing presence which allowed the multinational forces from other Western African countries to come in and handle the problem regionally." Marine helicopters and jets flying overhead and U.S. Navy ships looming on the horizon "reassured the humanitarian relief organizations and African peacekeeping forces that it was safe to go back to work."³⁷⁶

Notes

Source material used in the preparation of this publication was derived from the Sharp Edge and Assured Response files, Archives Section, Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Washington, D.C. The command chronologies of the Marine units involved are located in the Archives Section, MCHC, Washington, D.C. All oral history tapes referenced are located in the Center's oral history collection in the Archives Section. All Department of State messages and related materials are located in the authors' backup file on Liberia.

Chapter 1

Liberian Unrest Turns Violent

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Chapter 3 Evacuation Operations

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Appendix A

Chronology

Operation Sharp Edge 1990 to 1991

- 8 Mar 1990 22d MEU (SOC) deploys from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 23 Apr 1990 State Department issues travel advisory on Liberia and advises Americans to leave the country. Withdrawal of government employees begins.
22d MEU intelligence section begins to plan for Liberia contingency.
- 12 May 1990 22d MEU arrives at Camp de Canjuers, France.
Col Granville R. Amos directs that all units have a 12-hour plan to retrograde to the ships.
- 24 May 1990 22d MEU notified of possible mission in Liberia.
- 26 May 1990 22d MEU completes emergency backload.
USS *Peterson* is designated Mediterranean-based Amphibious Ready Group escort.
- 27 May 1990 22d MEU participates in joint French/American Memorial Day Ceremony, Draguignan, France.
22d MEU units on board USS *Saipan* and USS *Sumter* sail from Toulon, France.
22d MEU presents Operation Sharp Edge Courses of Action Brief to Deputy CinCEur, Gen James P. McCarthy, USAF, and CinCUSNavEur, Adm Jonathan Howe, USN, on board the *Saipan*.
ComSixthFleet and ComSOCEur embarked on *Saipan* for initial briefing and ship orientation.
- 28 May 1990 22d MEU forward command element given tentative permission to go to Liberia.
USS *Ponce* departs Toulon upon completion of boiler repairs.
Gen James P. McCarthy, USAF, Deputy CinCEur, and Adm Jonathan Howe, USN, CinCUSNavEur embarked on board *Saipan* to review NEO draft Operation Order.
- 29 May 1990 Forward command element departs *Saipan* and flies to Rota, Spain.
Peterson rendezvous with *Saipan* and *Sumter*.
- 31 May 1990 Forward command element flies from Rota to Liberia and is initially housed in the Greystone compound.
EuCom establishes Joint Task Force with Sixth Fleet as ComJTF.
A 75-man advance security force and one CH-46 helicopter moved to *Peterson*, which is sent ahead of the rest of the MEU/ARG at 30 knots.
- 1 Jun 1990 22d MEU receives CinCEur Sharp Edge Operation Order.
- 2 Jun 1990 *Peterson* arrives off the coast of Liberia.

130 ON MAMBA STATION

- 3 Jun 1990 *Saipan* and *Sumter* arrive off the coast of Liberia and begin 66 days in ModLoc before evacuation.
- 4 Jun 1990 *Ponce* arrives in ModLoc.
22d MEU force on board *Peterson* returns to *Saipan*.
- 5 Jun 1990 Two KC-130s from VMGR-252 arrive in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
22d MEU receives alert order for extraction of President Samuel Doe: one hour alert set.
- 6 Jun 1990 22d MEU briefs NEO plan to British Task Group 325.1 on board *Saipan*.
ModLoc named Mamba Station.
- 8-22 Jun 1990 22d MEU rehearses possible courses of action for Operation Sharp Edge. These include rehearsals for extracting President Doe and for multiple site NEOs.
- 10 Jun 1990 22d MEU augments forward command element with three-man radio battalion detachment.
349 Americans are evacuated on American Embassy charter flight from Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- Jun-Jul 1990 Forward command element prepares for possible NEO, which includes preparing a landing zone at the embassy and checking possible beach landing sites.
- 17 Jun 1990 American embassy evacuates 168 American citizens on charter aircraft from Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- 26 Jun 1990 250 Liberians march to American embassy gate calling on U.S. to intervene.
- 28 Jun 1990 New U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Peter De Vos, arrives at Spriggs-Payne Airport.
- 2 Jul 1990 22d MEU is given a one-hour Doe extraction and two-hour embassy reinforcement alert order.
- 10 Jul 1990 Commander Sixth Fleet calls on American Embassy and government of Sierra Leone officials.
- 11 Jul 1990 *Sumter* departs Mamba Station for equator crossing.
- 14 Jul 1990 *Sumter* returns to Mamba Station.
- 18 Jul 1990 *Peterson* in port at Abidjan, Ivory Coast.
- 19 Jul 1990 American embassy charter flight carries 15 American citizens out of country.
- 20 Jul 1990 22d MEU attains two-hour alert posture to reinforce embassy.
- 26 Jul 1990 Refugees fill U.S. compounds, formerly occupied by U.S. citizens now evacuated.
- 27 Jul 1990 Embassy on alert following small arms fire over Greystone compound.
- 28 Jul 1990 21-man Marine security guard team embarks onboard *Saipan*.
- 30 Jul 1990 22d MEU placed on one-hour alert status to reinforce embassy.
- 4 Aug 1990 Ambassador De Vos calls forward command element members to his office to discuss evacuation. The ambassador then seeks approval for military action through his chain-of-command.
Ambassador DeVos notifies Col Amos via the forward command element's radio that the evacuation will be necessary. Landing Hour is set for 0900 on 5 Aug.
State Department approves the military evacuation.

- 5 Aug 1990 Company E conducts evacuations of Voice of America and American telecommunications office sites.
Company H (Rein) reinforces and begins evacuation of embassy.
Security force at the embassy totals 237 Marines and sailors.
26th MEU forward command element flies from Norfolk, Virginia, to Monrovia via Rota, Spain, and Freetown, Sierra Leone.
22d MEU evacuates a total of 74 evacuees.
- 6 Aug 1990 26th MEU sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
22d MEU strength in embassy compound reduced to 192.
19 evacuees moved from Monrovia to Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 7 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 24 people to Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 8 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 8 people, including British Ambassador, to Freetown.
26th MEU forward command element arrives in Monrovia.
- 9 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 25, including French Ambassador and his staff. The French evacuees are transported to the French ship *Orage* and the remaining evacuees are taken to Freetown.
- 10 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 14.
- 11 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 35.
- 12 Aug 1990 22d MEU receives execute order from Joint Chiefs of Staff to evacuate foreign diplomats from Buchanan. *Saipan* and *Peterson* sail to Buchanan.
- 13 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 96 people from Buchanan including the Spanish Ambassador, the Swiss *Charge de Affairs*, and the Papal Nuncio.
The *Peterson* is detached from Operation Sharp Edge.
The number of Marines in the embassy compound is reduced to a reinforced platoon of 90.
- 15 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 12 people, including the Italian Ambassador.
- 16 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 359 people, including a woman who gives birth on board the *Saipan*.
- 17 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 88 people.
USS *Barnstable County* is attached to Amphibious Squadron Four for possible contingency operations.
- 18 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 745 people.
- 19 Aug 1990 22d MEU evacuates 109 people.
- 20 Aug 1990 Mediterranean-based ARG 3-90/26th MEU arrives on Mamba Station.
22d MEU evacuates eight people to Mediterranean-based ARG 3-90 ships.
- 20-24 Aug 1990 Mediterranean-based ARG/26th MEU are reconfigured with a great deal of cross-decking to create Contingency MAGTF 3-90 (CM 3-90).
- 21 Aug 1990 Elements of CM 3-90 conduct turnover with 22d MEU in embassy compound.
26th MEU relieves 22d MEU in a blue-water turnover.
22d MEU departs Mamba Station after evacuating a total of 1,648 persons (132 American citizens and 1,516 foreign nationals).
- 22 Aug 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 30 people.
- 26-28 Aug 1990 *Barnstable County* sails to Freetown and back with CH-46 helicopter on board to transfer evacuees.

- 29 Aug-1 Sep 90 *Barnstable County* sails to Freetown and back to transfer evacuees.
- 30 Aug 1990 LCpl D.J. Cassady is hit by a stray 7.62mm round, but is uninjured as the round is deflected by his flak jacket.
- 1-30 Sep 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 57 Americans and 398 foreign nationals with *Barnstable County* transporting the evacuees to Freetown and returning to Mamba Station.
- 17 Sep 1990 Armored vehicle and more than 200 of the government's Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers approach embassy. Marine reinforcements are inserted into the embassy compound via helicopter. AFL soldiers withdraw.
- 29 Sep 1990 Marines on Post Two report seeing muzzle flashes within 100 meters of the post. Rounds strike the main embassy building.
CM 3-90 evacuates 2 Americans and 28 foreign nationals.
- 1 Oct 1990 Five or six rounds hit Post Three (located on the embassy roof).
- 1-29 Oct 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates 27 Americans and 146 foreign nationals.
- 2 Oct 1990 One round strikes Post Two (embassy Gate Two).
- 11 Oct 1990 U.S. Navy Seabee team arrives from Norfolk, Virginia.
- 3 Nov 1990 USS *Newport* with Company L, BLT 3/8 embarked arrives on Mamba Station. Key personnel go to USS *Whidbey Island* for briefs.
- 4 Nov 1990 *Barnstable County* departs Mamba Station.
- 8 Nov 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates one American and six foreign nationals.
- 10 Nov 1990 Marine Corps Birthday. A ceremony was held on the flight deck of *Whidbey Island* and cake is taken ashore to the Marines at the embassy.
- 12 Nov 1990 CM 3-90 evacuates two Americans and four foreign nationals.
- 14 Nov 1990 Company L, BLT 3/8 conducts turnover with Company K and assumes security force duties at the embassy. Company K remains responsible for reinforcement mission. *Whidbey Island* Marines continue to provide communications, combat service support, and aviation support ashore.
- 24 Nov 1990 HMM-162 detachment completes three months on board the *Whidbey Island* even though the ship is not designed for sustained aviation operations.
USS *Nashville* departs Rota, Spain, for Mamba Station.
- 30 Nov 1990 *Nashville* arrives on Mamba Station and turnover briefs are conducted. Personnel and equipment are then transferred from *Whidbey Island* to *Nashville*.
- 1 Dec 1990 CM 3-90 change of command. LtCol Robert H. Kunkle relieves Maj George S. Hartley.
The number of Marines ashore is reduced to 40.
- 2 Dec 1990 The *Whidbey Island* detaches, departs Mamba Station, sails south for equator crossing, and then proceeds to the Canary Islands for liberty.
- Dec 1990 CM 3-90 continues embassy security mission. Calm prevails in Monrovia
- 28 Dec 1990 5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company, Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, is tasked with assuming the embassy security mission. Platoon members are recalled from Christmas leave.
- 6 Jan 1991 The 50 members of 5th Platoon, FAST Company depart Norfolk, Virginia.
- 7 Jun 1991 5th Platoon, FAST Company arrives at the embassy compound and conducts turnover with CM 3-90 forces.

- 9 Jan 1991 Operation Sharp Edge is officially terminated as CM 3-90 departs Mamba Station. FAST platoon remains to provide additional security for the embassy.
- 15 Feb 1991 FAST platoon departs Liberia via Navy C-130 aircraft.

Operations Assured Response and Quick Response 1996

- 27 Jan 1996 22d MEU embarks and sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 11 Apr 1996 22d MEU receives EuCom Assured Response execute order to deploy to Monrovia, Liberia, to conduct NEO. USS *Guam*, USS *Trenton*, and USS *Portland* steam west and staffs begin planning. USS *Tortuga* (with artillery and light armored vehicles) remains in port in Haifa, Israel, for repairs.
- 14 Apr 1996 Forward Liaison Cell (FLC) departs *Guam* for Joint Task Force (JTF) Assured Response headquarters in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 15 Apr 1996 22d MEU executive officer, LtCol Barnes, proceeds to the U.S. Embassy, Monrovia, Liberia, to conduct turnover with BrigGen Michael A. Canavan, USA, commander of JTF Assured Response.
- 17-19 Apr 1996 22d MEU staff members conduct liaison visit to Freetown.
- 20 Apr 1996 Company F, BLT 2/2 inserted into embassy compound and assumed responsibility for compound security from the U.S. Army's Company C, 3d Battalion, 325th Airborne Combat Team. Col M. Wayne Forbush assumes command of JTF Assured Response.
- 21 Apr 1996 Forward Support Base (FSB) Freetown established by a detachment from Fleet Air Mediterranean to facilitate the flow of logistics into and evacuees out of Monrovia.
- 30 Apr 1996 Marines in the embassy compound return fire for the first time. Marines engaged Liberian fighters during multiple incidents when Marine posts came under direct fire. Approximately six Liberians were killed in the exchanges. No Marines were seriously injured.
- 6 May 1996 Post Seven received and returned fire without effect.
- 9 May 1996 The *Tortuga* and a detachment from 22d MEU detached from JTF Assured Response to conduct Exercise Matador 96 in Spain.
- 20 May 1996 JTF Assured Response receives warning order to be prepared to conduct reinforcement operations in the Central African Republic. Execute order for Operation Quick Response immediately follows.
- 21 May 1996 32-man detachment from 22d MEU flies to Bangui, Central African Republic, and immediately processes 13 Americans who were awaiting evacuation. The evacuees are flown to a safe haven at Yaounde, Cameroon, by the Marine KC-130 that delivered the force.
- 22 May 1996 Marines process and evacuate 59 Americans from M'Poko Airfield in Bangui.
- 24 May 1996 French forces provided armored transport for logistical supplies from M'Poko Airfield to the U.S. Embassy. Marines process and evacuate 38 Americans and foreign nationals.
- 25 May 1996 Quick Response execute order is modified directing the insertion of a security augmentation and evacuation control center (ECC) force. Marines process and evacuate 122 Americans and foreign nationals.

- 26 May 1996 A 25-man augmentation force arrives in Bangui. Marines process and evacuate 100 Americans and foreign nationals.
- 27 May 1996 The last Americans requiring evacuation are processed and evacuated.
- 31 May 1996 The augmentation force begins redeploying to JTF Assured Response. During Operation Quick Response, 190 Americans and 258 foreign nationals were evacuated from the Central African Republic. Security element remains at U.S. Embassy.
- 2 Jun 1996 Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) Liberia received verbal execution order to prepare to deploy.
- 14 Jun 1996 SPMAGTF Liberia embarks and sails from Morehead City, North Carolina.
- 14 Jun 1996 Advance Party from SPMAGTF Liberia arrives in Monrovia and begins turnover with 22d MEU.
- 27 Jun 1996 SPMAGTF Liberia relieves 22d MEU as JTF Assured Response. Company L, 3/8 assumes security mission in embassy compound. 22d MEU has evacuated a total of 49 Americans and 260 foreign nationals from Liberia.
- 15 July 1996 Phase II draw down of Marines begins.
- 22 July 1996 Phase III draw down of Marines begins.
- 1 Aug 1996 Turnover of security in Bangui to American Embassy. Marines redeploy to USS *Ponce*. The FSB in Freetown is closed.
- 3 Aug 1996 Phase IV draw down of Marines begins. Security in Monrovia is turned over to Marine Security Guard personnel. The *Ponce* leaves Liberian waters.
- 5 Aug 1996 JTF Assured Response is disengaged. SPMAGTF Liberia and the *Ponce* revert to control of U.S. Atlantic Command and return to U.S. on 21 August 1996.

Appendix B

Command and Staff List

Operation Sharp Edge

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
CO Col Granville R. Amos
XO LtCol Stephen J. Labadie, Jr.
S-1 Capt George A. Kelling
S-2 Maj Stephen L. Sayko
S-3 LtCol Thomas W. Parker
S-4 Maj Donald P. Edwards
Battalion Landing Team 2/4
CO LtCol Robert L. Pugh
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261
CO LtCol Emerson N. Gardner
MEU Service Support Group 22
CO LtCol James W. Head
26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
CO Col William C. Fite
XO LtCol Richard H. Kunkle
S-1 Capt Kenny J. Mathis
S-2 Capt Steven R. Kaczmar
S-3 LtCol Brett D. Rayman
S-4 Maj Steven W. Forney
Battalion Landing Team 3/8
CO LtCol Robert G. Essink
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162
CO LtCol Darrel D. Browning
MEU Service Support Group 26
CO LtCol John W. Stull
Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 3-90 (24 Aug to 30 Nov 1990)
CO Maj George S. Hartley
Company K, BLT 3/8
CO Capt James K. Shannon
Detachment HMM-162
OiCMaj Daniel P. Johnson
Detachment MSSG-26
OiCCWO3 Edwin E. Deering
Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 3-90 (1 Dec 1990 to 8 Jan 1991)
CO LtCol Richard H. Kunkle
Company L, BLT 3/8
CO Capt William F. Crenshaw
Detachment HMM-162
OiCLtCol Tommy L. Patton

Detachment MSSG-26

OiC CWO3 Edwin E. Deering

5th Platoon, Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team (FAST) Company

Platoon Commander Capt Glen N. Chetham

Operations Assured Response and Quick Response

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

CO Col Melvin W. Forbush

XO LtCol James F. Barnes

S-1 Capt Joseph P. Spataro

S-2 Maj Gregory D. Seroka

S-3 LtCol Michael E. Dick

S-4 Maj Gary A. Lambertsen

Battalion Landing Team 2/2

CO LtCol Walter E. Gaskin

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162

CO LtCol Kenneth D. Bonner

MEU Service Support Group 22

CO LtCol John L. Grimmitt

Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force

CO Col Tony L. Corwin

XO LtCol Christopher J. Gunther

Battalion Landing Team 3/8 (-)

CO LtCol Paul E. Lefebvre

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (-)

CO LtCol Eugene K. Conti

MEU Service Support Group Detachment 28

OiCLtCol Lance R. McBride

Appendix C

Citations

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION MEDITERRANEAN AMPHIBIOUS READY GROUP 2-90

CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service during Operation SHARP EDGE from 29 May to 21 August 1990. The Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (MARG) 2-90 was dispatched to the vicinity of Monrovia, Liberia to aid in the possible evacuation of U.S. citizens from the country and to reinforce the United States Embassy in Monrovia. Due to an unstable, violent situation existing in the country because of an on-going civil war, the MARG was assigned to help ensure the safety of U.S. citizens, diplomats, and other noncombatants still in the country. Responding to a constantly changing political and military climate, MARG 2-90 formulated sufficient contingency plans to cope with a variety of possible missions that might be assigned. Maintaining a high state of readiness throughout the contingency, the MARG was called upon, beginning on 5 August, to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations in Monrovia, Liberia as well as the city of Buchanan. During Operation SHARP EDGE, over 1,600 noncombatants from 34 different countries were safely evacuated from the country. In addition, the United States Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia was reinforced and resupply operations began, delivering badly needed water, food, and medical supplies, thus enabling the Embassy to continue to operate during the civil war. By their uncanny resourcefulness, superior professionalism, and total devotion to duty, the officers and enlisted personnel of Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 2-90 reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Henry L. Garrett III
Secretary of the Navy

**JOINT MERITORIOUS UNIT AWARD
JOINT TASK FORCE OPERATION ASSURED RESPONSE**

CITATION:

The Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE distinguished itself by exceptionally meritorious achievement from 8 April 1996 to 12 August 1996. During this period, the Joint Task Force was responsible for the planning, coordination, and execution of the emergency evacuation of thousands of civilians from the chaos of civil war in Liberia and the Central African Republic. Within 24 hours of the initial alert order, the first elements of the Joint Task Force were enroute to the Intermediate Staging Base to establish a headquarters and to make final preparations for evacuation. Over the course of the next 4 months, men, women, and children of all ages, nationalities, and language were carried to safety in a courteous and efficient manner despite line hours, stressful work conditions, and 90 plus degree temperatures. When fighting among mutinous troops in the Central African Republic's capital city of Bangui threatened US citizens, Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE dispatched a forward liaison cell capable of providing security and evacuating threatened Americans. Their diligent efforts were responsible for the safe evacuation of hundreds of US citizens and third country nationals. Without hesitation, the men and women of Joint Task Operation ASSURED RESPONSE met this and all other challenges with success and dispatch in fulfilling the mission. By their exemplary performance of duty, the members of Joint Task Force Operation ASSURED RESPONSE have brought great credit upon themselves, their Service, and the Department of Defense.

Given under my hand this 8th day of October 1996

John M. Shalikashvili
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Appendix D

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

ACE	Air Combat Element. The ACE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is normally a reinforced Marine medium helicopter squadron comprised of 12 CH-46E Sea Knights, 4 CH-53E Super Stallions, 4 AH-1W Sea Cobras, and 4 UH-1N Hueys. A detachment of AV-8B Harrier aircraft also is routinely attached to the squadron and a detachment of KC-130 Hercules aircraft is placed on stand-by in the continental United States.
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia. The government's armed forces under President Samuel Kenyon Doe.
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group. Three to five amphibious ships on which a Marine Expeditionary Unit is embarked.
BLT	Battalion Landing Team. An infantry battalion usually reinforced with an artillery battery, light armored reconnaissance platoon, assault amphibian platoon, combat engineer platoon, and reconnaissance platoon.
CSSE	Combat Service Support Element. The CSSE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is an MEU Service Support Group.
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Military Observation Group. Established initially on an ad hoc basis as a multinational peacekeeping/peace enforcement force, ECOMOG and was the first such group to be established by a regional body.
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States. A regional group of 15 countries founded by treaty in May 1975 and conceived as a means toward economic integration and development of an economic union in West Africa.
FAST	Fleet Anti-terrorist Security Team. Marines from FAST companies deploy to provide additional security to U.S. facilities around the world in response to increased threats.
FCE	Forward Command Element. A Marine Expeditionary Unit's advance party that is deployed to an embassy in preparation for a noncombatant evacuation operation.
GCE	Ground Combat Element. The GCE of a Marine Expeditionary Unit is a battalion landing team.
INPFL	Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel faction led by Prince Yormie Johnson.
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force. A MAGTF is made up of command, ground combat, aviation combat, and combat service support elements.
MARG	Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group.

140 ON MAMBA STATION

- MEU (SOC) Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). A Marine Air-Ground Task Force made up of a command element, battalion landing team, composite helicopter squadron, and Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group. The Special Operations Capable (SOC) designation signifies the Marine Expeditionary Unit has completed a rigorous six-month training program and has been certified to accomplish a variety of missions including noncombatant evacuation operations.
- MSG Marine Security Guard. Marine security guard detachments are assigned to provide internal security to U.S. embassies.
- MSSG Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group. The combat service support element of a Marine Expeditionary Unit. MSSGs comprise supply, maintenance, engineer, and health service units.
- NEO Noncombatant Evacuation Operation.
- NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel faction led by Charles Taylor.
- RPG Rocket-propelled grenade. The RPG weapons generally used by West African combatants is the RPG-7, a Soviet antitank weapon.

Index

- Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 108
Abuja, Nigeria, 69, 102
Accra, Ghana, 81-83, 101, 109, 114, 116
Adriatic Sea, 103
Air Force Commands and Units
 4050th Operations Squadron, 74
 56th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, 111
Albania, 103
Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, 103
Alverson, Sgt Todd, 30
Ambe (LST 1123), 47
American Colonization Society, 2-3
American Cooperative School, 10, 15, 24
American Mining Company, 39
American Telecommunications Office, 15, 23-24, 28-29, 41
Americans for African Adoption, 106
Amos, Col Granville R., 6-7, 9, 12, 18-19, 23, 26, 32, 40, 42
Amphibious Squadron, 4, 8
Anders, 1stLt Richard E., 25
Annan, Secretary General Kofi, 108-109
Armed Forces of Liberia, 5
Army Commands and Units
 Company C, 325th Airborne Combat Team, 72, 74
 U.S. Army's South European Task Force (Airborne), 113
 U.S. Army Special Forces, 107
Augustine, 1stLt Joseph F. III, 42
Avenue du 18 Victoire, 90

Bangui, Central African Republic, 85, 87, 91, 94
Banjul, Gambia, 8, 35, 49
Barclay Training Center, 10, 15, 22, 52-53, 55, 57, 59, 62-63, 69, 72, 76-77, 81-83
Barclay, President Edwin James, 3-4
Barnes, LtCol James F., 73
Barnstable County (LST 1197), 42, 45, 47, 49-50, 52-53, 55, 59
Belliewaley, Liberia, 111
Benin, 113

Bennett, 1stLt Aaron E., 78
Benson Street, 30, 59
Bensonville, Liberia, 20
Berndt, Col Martin R., 48
Bethesda Naval Medical Center, 116
Black, 1stLt Charles N., 98
Blah, Vice President Moses, 114
Blaney, Ambassador John W., 108, 110, 112, 115
Bodkins, 2dLt Michael S., 30
Bokassa, Col Jean-Bedal, 85-86
Boley, George, 68-69
Bonfiglio, Sgt Brian J., 52
Bong Hills, 1
Brazzaville, Congo, 103-105, 107
Brewersville, Liberia, 10
British Embassy, 23, 55, 76
Browning, LtCol Darrell A., 45
Buchanan, Liberia, 1, 6, 20, 38-39, 41, 112
Bulk Challenge, 82
Bush, President George H., 6, 32, 36, 43, 108, 109-110, 114
Bushrod Island, 10, 21-23, 36, 49, 72
Byron, MajGen Michael J., 75

Cadwell, Liberia, 54, 63
Cameroon, 85, 89-90, 94
Camp Bealle, 85, 87, 90
Camp de Canjuers, 6, 11
Camp Du Kassai, 86, 94
Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 95, 108
Canavan, BGen Michael A., USA, 70, 74
Cape Mesurado, 2
Cape Sierra Hotel, 106
Capitol Hill, 35, 53
Careysburg, Liberia, 20
Carter Hall (LSD 50), 104, 112, 116
Carter, Adm Powell F., Jr., 43, 64
Cassady, LCpl Davis J., 52
Central African Republic, 85, 87-90, 93-94
Chad, 85
Chaney, 1stLt James D., 34
Cheatham, Capt Glen N., 64-65
Cheney, Secretary of Defense Richard B., 6

- Christopher, Secretary of State Warren, 88
 Clay-Ashland District, Monrovia, 19
 Cohen, Herman, 58
 Cohen, Secretary of Defense William S., 105
 Collins, Cpl Sean, 30
 Collins, LtCol Thomas N., 116
 Collins, Maj John T., 88-90
 Conakry, Guinea, 105-106
 Congo, 103, 105
 Congo River, 85
 Congo Town, 10, 42
 Contonou, Benin, 68
 Cooper, Lt Johnny J., 98
 Corwin, Col Tony L., 95-96, 98-99
 Crack Alley, 83
 Crenshaw, Capt William F., 62, 64
 Crown Hill, Monrovia, 22, 35
- Dakar, Senegal, 70, 72-73, 75, 88, 102
 Dako, David, 85
 David Dacko Road, 90
 Davis, LCpl Edward A. III, 71
 De Vos, American Ambassador Peter, 20-21, 23, 34, 42, 46, 55-56, 59, 62
 Deering, CWO-3 Edwin E., 45, 47, 51, 60-61
 Democratic Republic of Congo, 104
 Dick, LtCol Michael E., 93
 Doe, MSgt Samuel Kenyon, 4-6, 13, 17, 19-22, 42-43, 49, 53-54, 62
 Dogonyaro, MajGen Joshua, 58-59, 65
 Drager, Commodore James M., USN, 59
- Economic Community Ceasefire Monitoring Group, 107
 Economic Community of West African States, 8, 19-20, 35, 43, 62, 67-68, 74, 76, 81, 83, 101, 108
 Economic Community of West African States Military Observation Group, 47
 Eritrea, 103
 Essink, LtCol Robert G., 45
 European Special Operations Command, 73
 Executive Mansion, 42, 54, 59
 Exercise Purple Star, 95
- Fairfax County* (LST 1193), 47
 Fallon, Lt David M., 98
 Farrand, Cpl Ison S., 78, 80
 Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, 3
 Fisher, Edward J., 60
 Fite, Col William C. III, 43-46
 Fitzwater, Marlin, 32
 Forbush, Col M. Wayne, 73-75, 81, 83-84, 88-89, 94
 Ford, LtCol Barry M., 103
- Freeport, Liberia, 3, 54
 Freetown, Sierra Leone, 18, 21-22, 42-43, 47, 50, 53, 58, 60, 70, 73, 75, 82, 88, 94, 97, 102, 105
 French Embassy, 93
 French Foreign Legionnaires, 91, 93
 Frick, Col Andrew P., 112, 116
- Galvin, Gen John R., USA, 43
 Gambia, 36, 49, 113
 Garbande, Liberia, 6
 Gardner, Col Emerson N., Jr., 25-28, 103-104
 Gardner, Cpl William A., 79
 Gatar, Commo Stanley D., USN, 38, 45
 Gbarnga, 20, 69
 Geissler, Capt Eric L., 100
 German Embassy, 38, 42
 Ghana, 36, 113
 Gibson Street, 79, 82
 Gio Tribe, 4-6
 Grand Gedeh County, Liberia, 5
 Grause, Capt Francis P., USN, 48, 57, 60
 Greenville, Liberia, 111
 Greenwood, LtCol Thomas C., 105-106
 Greystone compound, 10, 23, 30, 69, 76, 83, 101, 111
Guam (LPH 9), 73-74, 81-82, 84, 88-89, 94, 97
 Guinea, 1, 5, 38, 105
 Gunther, LtCol Christopher J., 97-98, 100
- Hansen, Col Willis H., 11
 Harbel, Liberia, 3, 8, 68
 Harper, Liberia, 1
 Hartley, Maj George S., 45, 48, 55-57, 59-60, 63
 Hartnett, Larry, 13
 Head, LtCol James W., 37
 Helland, Col Samuel T., 104
Henry J. Kaiser (T-AO-187), 53
 Henson, SSgt Effard T., 29
 Himes, 1stLt John, 94
 Hobbs, Cdr Phillip G., USN, 8
 Howe, Adm Jonathan T. USN, 6, 9
- I-Hop building, 78-80
Inchon (LPH 12), 45, 47
 Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, 9
 Independent Whig Party, 3
 Inenger, Gen John M., 75
 Interfaith Mediation Committee of the Liberian Council of Churches, 19
 Italian Embassy, 42
 Ivory Coast, 1
Iwo Jima (LHD 7), 111-112, 116
- Jett, Dennis C., 14-15, 19-20, 63

- John F. Kennedy Hospital, 22
 Johnson, Maj Daniel P., 45, 54-55, 59-60
 Johnson, Prince Yormie, 9, 20, 21-23, 35, 48, 54, 56-58, 65
 Johnson, Roosevelt, 68-69, 81-83
 Johnston, 1stLt Gary S., 30
 Joint Task Force Assured Response, 88, 99, 107
 Joint Task Force Liberia, 110, 116
 Jones, Gen James L., 110
 Jordan, Ambassador Mosina H., 87, 90
 Joulwan, Gen George A., USA, 73, 75, 95
- Kabbah, President Ahmad Tejan, 105, 107
 Kabila, Laurent-Desire, 103-104
 Kakata, Liberia, 6
Kearsarge (LHD 3), 104-105, 107-108
 Kenney, Capt Jeffrey J., 76-77, 79-80
 Key Junction, Liberia, 110-111
 Kinshasa, Congo, 103-104
 Kolingba, Gen Andre-Dieudonne, 85-86
 Korean Embassy, 42
 Koromah, Maj Johnny Paul, 104, 106-107
 Krahn, 4-6, 54, 69, 70, 72, 76-77, 79-80, 82-83
 Krebs, Capt David A, 88, 90-91
 Kromah, Alhiji, 68-69, 83
 Kufuor, President John, 116
 Kunkel, LtCol Richard H., 47, 63
- Labadie, LtCol Stephen J., Jr., 7-8, 12-15, 23
 Landherr, Cpl James, 20
 Landing Force Sixth Fleet, 6
 Landing Zones
 Bravo, 98
 Condor, 29
 Dove, 28
 Magic, 15, 30, 42, 46, 49, 52
 Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center, 116
 Lapine, Lt Seth I., 98
 Lavrinovich, 1stLt Walter E., Jr., 63
 Lefebvre, LtCol Paul E., 96-97, 101
 Liberia Peace Council, 68
 Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, 108
 Libreville, Gabon, 103
 Lister, Capt Jeffrey E., 97, 99
 Livengood, SSgt Scott T., 89
 Lofa River., 1
 Love, SSgt Timothy, 13
 Lowe, LtCol Darrell M., USMC (Ret), 14
 Luehrs, Capt Richard E. II, 88, 90, 94
 Lungi Airfield, 36, 42, 50, 60, 64, 72, 88
- M'Poko Airfield, 85, 87-88, 90, 93-94
 Mahoney, Capt Leon F., 95
- Mali, 113
 Mamba Point, 36, 51, 59, 69, 77, 82-83, 110
 Mamba Point's Lighthouse Hill, 57
 Mamba Station, 10, 16, 45-46, 50, 62, 65, 74, 102
 Mammy Yoko Hotel, 106
 Mandingo Tribe, 5
 Mano Tribe, 4-6
 Marine Corps Commands and Unit
 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, 112
 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), 6, 9, 11-12, 42-43, 46, 51-52, 59, 73-74, 84-85, 88, 93-96, 98-99, 104-105, 107
 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)), 42-46, 63, 67, 103-104, 111-112
 2d Combat Engineer Battalion, 2d Marine Division, 42, 100
 2d FAST Company, 111
 2d Marine Division, 95
 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 108
 8th Marines, 95-96
 Battalion Landing Team 3/8, 45, 52, 62, 98
 Battalion Landing Team 2/2, 74, 82, 88, 98
 Battalion Landing Team 2/4, 6, 11, 23, 30, 42
 Battery B, 10th Marines, 73, 82
 Battery L, 10th Marines, 114
 Combat Service Support Detachment 28, 96, 98, 101
 Company D (-), 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 73
 Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 3-90, 44-45, 47, 49, 59, 63, 65
 Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (FAST) Company, 64
 II Marine Expeditionary Force, 83, 95-96
 Marine Aerial Refueling Squadron 252, 18, 88, 97
 Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, Atlantic, 64
 Marine Corps Security Force Company, 110
 Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461, 96, 97
 Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167, 96
 Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162, 45, 74, 84
 Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 261, 6, 9, 27, 106
 Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264, 97, 112
 Marine Security Guard Battalion, 21
 Marines Corp Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, 89, 97

- Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 97-1, 103
 MEU Service Support Group 22, 6, 36, 37, 74, 90, 105
 MEU Service Support Group 26, 45, 112
 Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force, 94
 Marine House, 100
 Martin, Capt Gregory, USN, 116
 Masonic Temple, 30
 McBride, LtCol Lance R, 96
 McCann-Willis, Pinkie, 106
 McCarthy, Gen James P., USAF, 9
 McClaine, Cpl Phillip L., 23
 McMurtry, Mrs. Penny, 16
 McWilliams, Jim, 15
 Mellinger, Capt Eric M., 74, 98
 Mesurado River, 10, 22, 49, 115
 Mezbau Gate, 71
 Milam, Ambassador William B., 73, 81, 99, 102
 Mize, BGen David M., 87-88, 100-101
 MoCaf Brewery, 93
 Mollahan, Capt David J., 7, 15
 Monrovia, 1-3, 6-7, 18-20, 28, 30, 36, 38, 41, 48, 64, 67, 108, 111, 114
 Moose, George, 81
 Mount Coffee Dam, 20
 Movement for Democracy in Liberia, 108
 Movement for Justice in Africa, 4
 Mozambique, 103
 Mudge, Col Wayne, USAF, 74
 Mundy, LtGen Carl E., Jr., 43
 MV *Tano River*, 42, 47

Nashville (LPD 13), 47, 62-63, 65, 103, 112, 116
Nassau (LHA 4), 103-104
 National Democratic Party of Liberia, 4
 National Patriotic Front of Liberia, 5, 67
 National Patriotic Party, 108
 National Unification Policy, 3
 NATO Stabilization Force, 103
 Naval Special Warfare Group 2, 10
 Navy Commands and Units
 Amphibious Ready Group 3-90, 43-44
 Amphibious Squadron (Phibron) 8, 67, 74
 Amphibious Squadron 2, 44
 Amphibious Squadron 4, 9, 12
 Fleet Air Mediterranean, 74
 Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 2, 89
 Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland, 111
 Naval Station, Rota, Spain, 7, 11, 47, 88, 111
 Naval Surface Forces, Atlantic, 95
 Navy SEALs, 10, 15, 17, 38-39, 71, 115
 Sixth Fleet, 45, 65, 84, 88

 Newman, LtCol Bruce, USA, 8
Newport County (LST 1179), 47, 62
 Niger River, 1
 Nigeria, 36, 38, 113
 Nimba County, 1, 4-5
 NNS *Ambe*, 42
 Nsimalen Airfield, 91-92

 Obangui River, 85
 Obeng, LtGen Seth, 109
 Oles, Capt Gary R., 24, 29, 45
 Operation Almandin II, 87
 Operation Barracuda, 85
 Operation Iraqi Freedom, 108
 Operation Matador, 93
 Operation Noble Obelisk, 105
 Operation Sea Angel, 73
 Operation Sheltering Sky, 110
 Operation Shining Express, 108
 Operation Silver Wake, 103
 Organization of African Unity, 19, 35, 68, 108

 Paquereau, Capt Thierry, 90, 93-94
 Parker, Lt Warren T., 38
 Parker, LtCol Thomas W., 39-41
 Patasse, President Ange-Felix, 85-87
 Paynesville, 20
 Peace Corps, 93-94
Pensacola (LSD 38), 103
 People's Redemption Council, 4
 Peterman, LCdr Robert, USN, 8, 15, 30, 38-40
Peterson (DD 969), 9-10, 14, 38
 Po River, 115
Ponce (LPD 15), 9-10, 94-95, 97-99, 101, 104
Portland (LSD 37), 73, 81-82, 84
 Potter, BGen Richard, USA, 9
 Powell, Gen Colin L., USA, 6
 Progressive Alliance of Liberia, 4
 Pugh, LtCol Robert L., 24, 26, 32, 42

 Quainoo, LtGen Arnold, 48
 Queen Elizabeth quay, 42
 Quin, Jack, 29
 Quiwonkpa, Gen Thomas, 4, 5

 Republic of Zaire, 103
 Revolutionary United Front, 67, 105
 Roberts International Airport, 3, 6, 8, 10, 20, 110, 112, 114
 Robertsport, Liberia, 1
 Robison, Maj Norman J., 88-90, 93-94
 Rogers, Capt Daniel S., 30, 34
 Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense Donald H., 110-111

- Rwanda, 103
 Ryan, MajGen Michael D., 95
 Rymer, 1stSgt Luther T., 30
- Sachtleben, Maj Glen R., 7-8, 13-15, 22-23, 30
 Saint Paul Bridge, 111
Saipan (LHA 2), 7, 9-10, 19, 24, 26-27, 30, 36, 38, 39-40, 42, 45
 Sam E apartments, 31-32, 52, 63
 Sanchez, Sgt Luiz E., 69
 Sawyer, Amos, 68
 Sayko, Maj Stephen L., 11
 Seko, President Mobutu Sese, 103-104
 Sekou Toure Drive, 30, 59, 76, 79, 82
 Senegal, 113
 Shalikashvili, Gen John M., USA, 95
 Shannon, Capt James K., 42, 45, 52, 57, 59
 Sharp, Sgt Kenneth M., 19
 Shelton, Capt Paul A., 75
 Sierra Leone, 1, 5, 19, 36, 52, 55, 67, 81, 104-105
 Sinkor, Liberia, 10, 20, 42
 Slater, 1stSgt Allan M., 90-91
 Smith, RAdm Layton W., USN, 59
 Somalia Drive, 111
 Southern European Task Force, 116
 Special Operations Command, Europe, 71, 74, 93
 Spriggs-Payne Airport, 10, 18, 20, 23, 38, 42, 52, 63, 65, 84, 101
 St. Paul River, 10, 21, 49
 St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 22
 Staley, Col David, USA, 12-14, 19, 21
 Stull, LtCol Jonathon W., 45
 Sudan, 85
Sumter (LST 1181), 9-10
 Swedish Embassy, 38
- Tanzania, 103
 Taylor, President Charles, 4-6, 9, 18-20, 38, 42, 49, 55-56, 58-59, 65, 67, 69, 81, 83, 100, 108-114
 Tenaglia, Lt James A., 98
 Thorette, Gen Bernard, 87
 Togo, 113
 Tolbert, Wiliam K., 4
Tortuga (LSD 46), 73, 82
Trenton (LPD 14), 73, 81
 True Whig Party, 3
 Tubman Boulevard, 10
 Tubman, President Willam S., 3-4
 Turner, MajGen Thomas, USA, 113
 Tutsi Tribe, 103
 Tuzinoski, Cpl Dennis, 30
 Twadell, Ambassador William H., 75
- U.S. Agency for International Development, 5, 23, 92, 93
 U.S. European Command, 5-6, 11, 14, 24, 34, 38, 43-44, 45, 47-48, 52, 60, 63-65, 67, 70, 81, 87, 93, 98-99, 101-103, 105
 U.S. Special Operations Command, 5
 Uganda, 103
 United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, 67
 United Nations, 68
 United Nations Drive, 10, 23, 30, 33, 53, 56-57, 59, 65, 76, 78-79
 United Nations Observer Mission Liberia, 68
- Vaitown, Monrovia, 35
 Vicenza, Italy, 113
 Voice of America, 10, 15
- Wackenhut Corporation, 14
 Ward, LCpl Wade M., 79
 Wellington apartments, 31, 52-53, 71
 West Point, Monrovia, 35
Whidbey Island (LSD 41), 45-47, 53, 55, 57, 62-63
 White, Capt Charles, USN, 74-75
 White, Col Thomas J., USA, 19, 36
 Widdifield, Sgt Scott R., 8, 15
 Williams, Adm James D., USN, 43-45
 Williams, VAdm James D., USN, 6, 9, 10, 32
 Wologisi Mountains, 1
- Yaounde, Cameroon, 88, 91
 Young, Capt William D., USN, 74
- Zaire, 85, 104

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